

*Ma nuit chez Maude* (minus the theology), Woody Allen's *Interiors* (minus the hysteria), or Tanner's *Le milieu du monde* (minus the passion); that is, at ease among the other personal universes of contemporary aurorial cinema.

Secondly, in so effortlessly soaring to this standard, *Claire cette nuit et demain* ironically ups the ante for the Canadian feature in general, and strongly becomes yet another indicator of the possibility of a real creative boom in the not-too distant future (some elements of which are already visible here and there). It is worth pointing out that *Claire* was done in an unhurried 20 days on a \$600,000 budget by a carefully chosen and very professional team, an approach to filmmaking that visibly commends itself.

The irony, of course, is that the 'secret' of *Claire's* success rests upon the powerful infusion into the film of the aesthetic of the TV commercial, that medium's most successful form which has re-energized such staples as the cop show (most notably, *Miami Vice* and for a Canadian equivalent, if to a lesser extent, *Night Heat*).

Yet if *Claire cette nuit et demain* most beautifully balances its constitutive tensions, as *Claire*, the character, says of her success, as she muses on the freedom that she controls but cannot live, "It's all very nice, but it's an identity card for whom?" Beyond the dazzling display of resplendant surfaces, there's a profound (and growing) existential anxiety that the film simply points to; for, like *Claire*, it does not know either what to do when the polymorphous perversity of existence itself becomes merely generic, but, like *Claire*, it can, for a while at least, seek comfort and refuge in the aestheticization of life.

For the *kitsch* universe - that is, one from which shit has been negated - comes with a price. Eventually, massive aesthetic constipation results.

But why anticipate problems? For now, it should really be quite enough to savour the fact that *Claire cette nuit et demain* is that astounding, rare thing in cinema: a masterpiece.

Michael Dorland •

**CLAIRE CETTE NUIT ET DEMAIN** d. Nardo Castillo p. Arnie Gelbart, Charles Ohayon sc. Castillo, Gelbart from an idea by Victor Désy 1st a. d. Mireille Goulet cont. Brigitte Germain d. o. p. Allen Smith asst. cam. Robert Guertin trainee Borek Sodivsek stills Attila Dory art. dec. Anne Pritchard set des. Jean-Baptiste Tard des. Michèle Forest asst. des. Nathalie Noël props. Daniel Huysmans montage/dec. Paul Vanzadloff p. sup. Lorraine DuHamel admin. J. Serge Alary acct. Chantal Groleau p. sec. Johanne Messier loc. scout Pierre Laberge p. assts. Norbert Dufour, Frédéric Lefebvre ed. François Gill asst. ed. Christine Denault sd. Patrick Rousseau boom Véronique Gabillaud make-up Diane Simard ward. John Stowe, Huguette Gagné dresser Francine Blais gaffer Jacques Fortier elect. Claude Fortier, Gilles Fortier key grip François Dupéré grip Sylvain Labrecque urit. pub. Monique Gignac, Brigitte Germain l.p. Liliane Clune, Luc Matte, Nicole Leblanc, Maryse Pelletier, Margarita Stocker, François Cartier, Gisèle Rousseau, Michel Laperrière, Johanne Messier, Francisco, Francine Alepin, Denise Boulanger, Jacques Leblanc, Roger Léger, France Laverdière, Louis-M. Morin, Pascale Navarro, Véronique Pinette, Max St-Amour, François Sylvestre, Michel Provost, and the voices of Victor Désy and Jean Lafontaine. p.c. Cléo 24 Inc., (514) 842-8336, with financial participation of Telefilm, SGC, and SRC. dist. Vivafilm Running time: 145 mins.

John Paizs'

## Crime Wave

**C** *Crime Wave*, the first feature film by Winnipeg's thoroughly postmodern John Paizs, displays all the healthy shortcomings of an early work by a potential mindblower of a director: too crammed with ideas and greedy for gags to heed the statutes of coherent plot development, *Crime Wave* unfortunately suggests that the hoary old critical cliché about parts amounting to more than wholes can't be retired yet.

But those parts, in this case, are both abundant and remarkable. Moreover, they can be discovered not only in up-front bits of inspired silliness (like the character who arrives at a suburban costume party - and who can't understand why conversation crumbles in his presence - dressed as the psycho who threatened to blow himself up in the neighbourhood Mac's Milk), but on such less immediately gutbusting levels as editing, soundtrack and (honest) colour-processing. Thematically, the film is no shirker, either: while remaining principally and effectively a comedy, *Crime Wave* ponders such pertinent but unlikely laugh-fodder as the relationship between culture and social behaviour; Canadian cultural Ameriphilia and its schizoid effects: creative stagnation, and the perpetually self-replenishing nature of popular culture. To complain of the movie's lacking in overall consistency is, in fact, to ignore the wealth of those ideas and elements that keep popping up in the middle of the road and throwing *Crime Wave* off course - Paizs may not take us where he tells us he

will (or where we think he should), but he sure does take us on one wily and wacky ride.

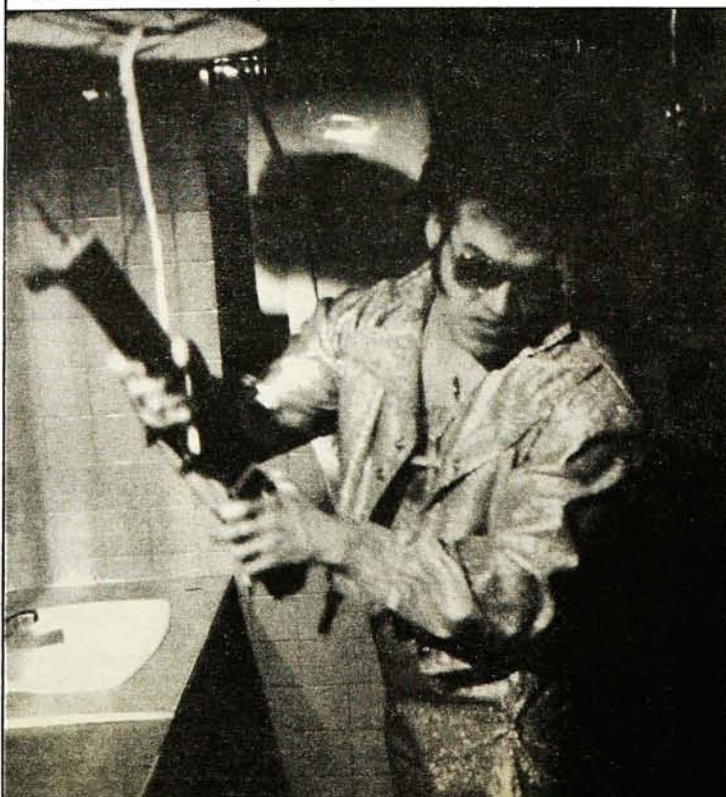
With his first four (significantly sit-com-length) short films (available, like *Crime Wave*, from the Winnipeg Film Group), Paizs established a mode of filmmaking that simultaneously reproduced, defamiliarized and criticized the American pop culture dreck that, like it or not, comprised the most sensational and penetrating visceral experience for most middle-class suburban Canadian kids growing up in the post-television age (kids for whom Don Messer was no substitute for other Dons like Adams, Knotts or Corleone). What distinguishes Paizs' practice from those myriad forms he so uncannily, and with deadpan directness, emulates, is a surrealist sensibility that exposes the structures and assumptions behind these media-systems by simply scrambling them. Thus, in *The International Style* (1983), Paizs' most purely surreal film, B-Western cowboys invade a James Bondish dinner soirée and, like splatter-movie zombies, threaten to cannibalize the participants. What makes the short films so effective, both as entertainment and polemic, is the uncovering of the fundamentally systemic nature of pop culture forms they so gleefully vandalize; in other words, a blasphemous magnification of the basic principle of internal logic upon which most pop culture narratives depend on to maintain their credibility and transparency. Paizs' films challenge the hegemony of these structures, not by blowing them apart with ridicule but by conflating a number of them together *without* disrupting the narrative flow. The revelation lies in the realization that, while characters, costumes and conventions may change, the basic story remains the same - to be played out eternally - and with an absurd subconscious, dreamlike shuffling of elements, forever deep in our TV-perforated sensibilities.

*Crime Wave* takes this practice of deconstructive, ironic mimicry and pushes it a step further: it's a meta-meta-movie-movie. The frame of the film, set in an impossibly sunshiny, picture-perfect suburban neighbourhood (replete with perennial bird-chirps on the soundtrack) is pure '50s family sitcom - when Eva (Eva Kovacs), the 12-year-old narrator of the film, makes her daily morning skip to the mailbox, you could swear you see Wally and Beaver pass by.

The sitcom context, which introduces us to the cipher-like, would-be "colour crime movie" writer Steven Penny (John Paizs), through the Terence Malick-like device of a young girl's narration, also establishes *Crime Wave's* principal strategy of smudging characteristic distinctions between style and content, fantasy and reality, imagined and experienced, medium and mediated. While the story, which revolves around Steven's comically-lachrymose attempts to surmount the somewhat selective strain of writer's block he suffers from (he's great with beginnings and endings, but stymied by middles), functions at the outset as the point of access into a number of increasingly surreal "imaginary" sequences - Steven's story fragments visualized, his nightmares and hallucinations - the point of *Crime Wave* is not the distinction between actual and idealized experience, but the absolute interdependence of both. This is evident, if not yet obvious, from the opening, which introduces Steven's situation in stylistic terms that are every bit as codified in generic terms as his subsequent stories and hallucinations - if Steven's *life* is rendered as a kind of Kafkaesque Bob Cummings Show, can we really trust the *imaginary* nature of his mondo-bizarro dreams and stories? That *Crime Wave's* world is one where the media, its consumers and its effects are indistinguishable is made obvious during the sequence in Steven's tiny, garage-attic apartment (lit only by the appropriately cathode-like blue of an electric streetlamp outside the window), when a roomful of characters from Steven's middleless colour crime movies materialize and commence to party, flirt and eventually brawl with one another. In *Crime Wave's* micro-waved world of media and mental meltdown, Jung's collective unconscious runs smack into Larry Curly and Moc.

Playing on a neat reversal of *The Wizard of Oz* (itself a mythic pop text of not inconsiderable influence) the final part of *Crime Wave* depicts the odyssey of innocent abroad Steven (a kind of catatonic Canadian Dorothy Gale) to Kansas, of course, where he has been summoned by bogus script-doctor C. Jolly (a lizard-lipped milquetoast with a ten-gallon stetson and a parallel capacity for homicidal perversion). While this passage in *Crime Wave* was extensively criticised following its Toronto Festival of Festivals première because its sombre surrealism subverted the gag-ridden satire of the film's first 45 minutes\*, Steven's eerie trip to the post-apocalyptic, chemically-poisoned night-world of *Crime Wave's* Kansas is a logical and profoundly resonant extension of the hitherto purely comic descent into the media melting-pot. The trip to America is, for Steven and the

• *Crime Wave's* John Paizs experiencing media and mental meltdown



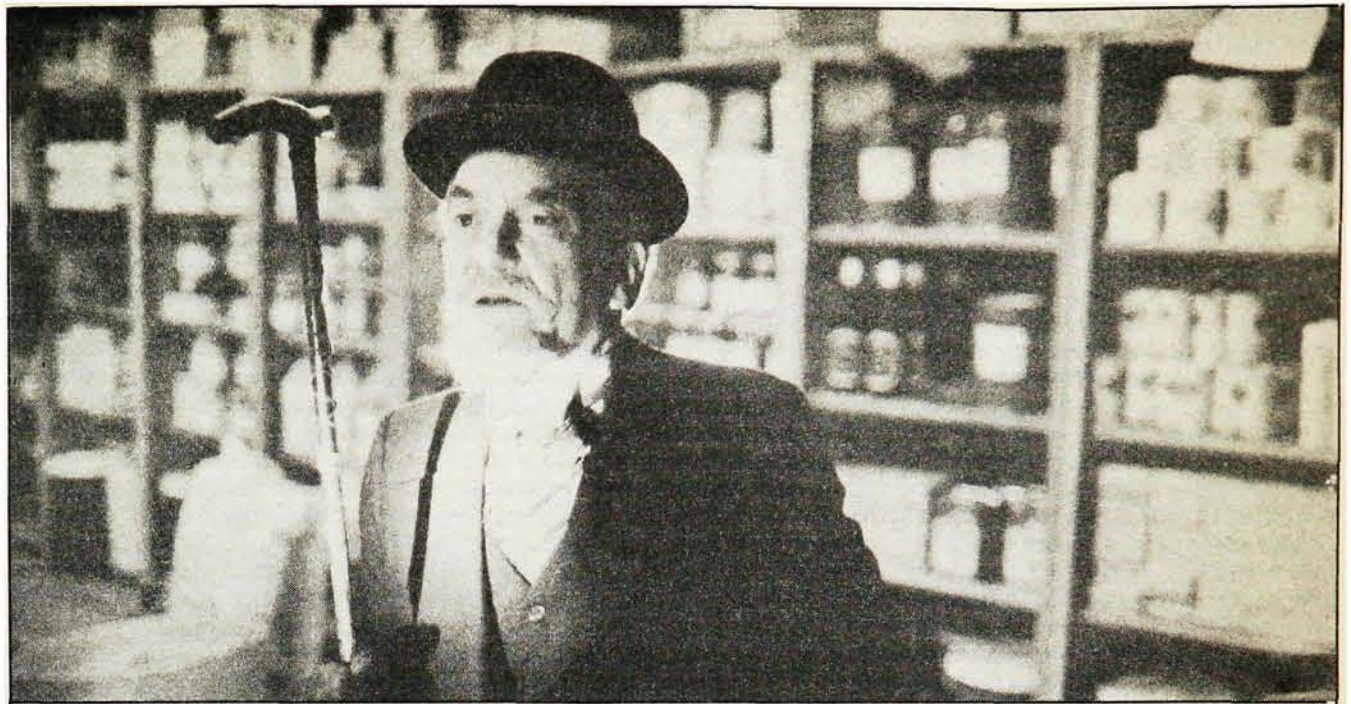
countless couch-potato Canadians he represents, a kind of journey to a sub-conscious homeland, which, like Oz's Emerald City, represents something as mysterious and alien as it is magical and magnetic. Simultaneously Steven is confronted both with his desire for and his difference from the media-created world of America he's so desperately wanted to be part of (a condition of cultural schizophrenia as characteristically Canadian as any other factor of our much-stalked identity). On the one hand, his reverential awe leaves him vulnerable to exploitation and a likely ravaging at the hands of the perverse Dr. Jolly (who exploits the Canadian's reverence for Yankee knowhow with no less cunning and ruthlessness than Donald Brittain's Hal C. Banks did), on the other, Steven finds a family in Kansas – albeit a crippled one, consisting of an invalid hillbilly woman and her oafish son – a family that was conspicuously absent from the otherwise TV-idyllic suburban environs of the first half of the film. And it is the strength provided by this image of American familial solidarity – retarded as it is – that fortifies Steven sufficiently to return to Winnipeg and crank out some middles.

*Crime Wave* may be the first Canadian movie that addresses the perennial issue and phenomenon of American media saturation in Canada that does not take absolute sides (it's neither nostalgic nor wistful, like *My American Cousin*, nor is it angry and cynical, like *Canada's Sweetheart: The Saga Of Hal C. Banks*), but instead acknowledges the actual complexity of the Canadian obsession (an obsession characterized by both attraction and revulsion) with our big brother's ceaseless northwards populace onslaught. If only for that, *Crime Wave* is a singular, and singularly Canadian (for what it's worth) achievement. That it has so much more to offer, including the promise of a future for Canadian cinema that develops out of, instead of withdrawing from or surrendering to, the inescapable fact of American cultural occupation of our Sonys and our subconscious, makes it something of a revelation to boot.

Geoff Pevere •

*\*At the time of writing, Paizs was hard at work shooting an alternate ending to Crime Wave, following the director's dissatisfied reaction with the split Toronto Festival reception. Paizs' concerns are commercial and thoroughly justified, as the journey-to-Kansas section of the movie is too dark and tonally at odds with the first part to make the movie a likely hit with distributors and mass-market audiences. My hope is that he keeps the original Crime Wave, in all its unbalanced, brilliant looniness, and releases them both. The more versions of this corker the better.*

**CRIME WAVE** d./sc./art.d./cam./p./ John Paizs ed. Paizs, Gerry Klyn, Jon Coultts p.c. Favorite Pictures Studios, 88 Adelaide St., Winnipeg, R3A 0W3; dist. Winnipeg Film Group, (204) 942-6795 **running time:** 80 mins., **l.p.** John Paizs, Eva Kovacs, Darrel Baran, Jeffery Owen Madden, Barbara MacDonald, Tea Andrea Tanner, Mark Yuill, Neil Laurie, Mitch Funk.



• *Le Matou's* evil Ratablavsky (Jean Carmet): ancient Quebec icon

## Jean Beaudin's **Le Matou**

Florent Boissonneault is a young Québécois who works at a boring job and has a passion for restaurants. When a mysterious gentleman by the name of Ratablavsky offers him the chance to buy a local Montreal restaurant, La Binerie, famous for its Québécois cuisine, he invests his life's savings in it. To make ends meet he adopts as his partner a co-worker, Len Slipskin. Ratablavsky and Slipskin, however, manage to cheat him out of his restaurant and his money. But, with the help of his wife, Elise, he amasses enough capital from the sale of French-Canadian antiques to buy a new restaurant across the street from La Binerie. With the help of his friends (a French cook and a slum child) Florent defeats his ex-partner and the devilish Ratablavsky.

*Le Matou*, the novel by Yves Beauchemin was a huge success, not only in Quebec, but also in France where it won the prestigious Prix du livre d'été in 1983 and was selected for the French Book of the Month Club. It is an upbeat book.

But Beauchemin has been accused of anti-Semitism for making his devil figure, Ratablavsky, of Polish-Jewish origin. The author has publicly expressed regrets for his choice of antecedents for Ratablavsky, and all references to the character's religion have been expurgated from the English translation. And from the film as well.

*Le Matou*, the film, is fast-paced and entertaining, and, when the film premiered at the close of the World Film Festival, certainly the audience seemed to enjoy both the comedy, which is rather broad and caricatural, and the melodrama where the idealistic young couple wins against the devil himself. Yet a viewing of this Canada-France co-

production does not dispell the uncomfortable impression that either the Jew or, at least, the immigrant (still of Polish origin) has replaced the English capitalist as the villainous opponent to a new Québécois society.

The ally of the diabolical Ratablavsky (Jean Carmet) is the slippery Slipskin (Miguel Fernandez). It is hard to place him. He speaks mostly English and some very bad French; the film is very unspecific as to his origins. He seems to be some sort of Anglophone of immigrant origin. With a name like Len Slipskin it is hard for me to see this character as anything but Jewish. Included in his villainous traits is a liking for French-Canadian girls who are, in his words, "such good fucks." Slipskin seems reminiscent of Mordecai Richler's anti-heroes. Richler, however, places his heroes' sexism and opportunism in a psychological and social context. *Le Matou* does not. The anger of the new Québécois society seems to have been deflected from the English to the immigrant capitalist (Ratablavsky) and small entrepreneur (Slipskin).

Perhaps this is why the story supposedly takes place in the Plateau Mont-Royal (even though only a few of the location shots are actually filmed there). For it is here that the immigrant population is probably thickest in Montreal and it is here that immigrant entrepreneurs and restaurateurs abound. Do the Québécois feel that they are being pushed out of what was once a traditional French-Canadian working-class neighbourhood? It is true that gentrification has become a threat to this area of Montreal, but it is also a district where traditionally the waves of new immigrants have settled. The district at one time harboured the then-recent Jewish immigrants of Eastern Europe and Russia. In the film, the contemporary immigrant presence is used as a colourful backdrop. But, more insidiously, the immigrant comes to represent the forces of evil that the hero must conquer in order to establish the new Québécois society.

If one looks into the history of Québécois cinema one can see that other forces beside xenophobia must be at play in this social fable. Ratablavsky is reminiscent of an icon from the Québécois' cultural past, that is, Séraphin.

Séraphin was the main character in a popular novel, a radio program in the 1940s, a TV program in the 1950s, and two films, *Un homme et son péché* (1948) and *Séraphin* (1949). The diabolic Séraphin was a money-lender who through his greed for gold and his knowledge of the law controlled the village and was emblematic of the Québécois' fear of the money-principle. In her important study of Québécois cinema, *Un cinéma orphelin*, Christiane Tremblay-Daviault sees Séraphin's sin as that of political and economic power over a world that was supposed to be based on spiritual values and human relations, the world of rural French-Canadian society.

In *Un homme et son péché*, the force of money is greater than the force of nature. The hero, Alexis, is robbed by Séraphin of his land and his love. In the sequel, *Séraphin*, Alexis wins out over the money-lender and reestablishes himself with a new wife on virgin land. The continuation of Québécois society is assured. In *Le Matou*, Florent (Serge Dupire) also wins out over Ratablavsky in the end and ensures the continuation of Québécois society with the birth of his first child (he promises 23 more). But Florent does not base his prosperity on the promise of the land; on the contrary, he only goes back to his rural roots so that he can exploit his cultural past. His wife (Monique Spaziani) is an expert in French-Canadian antiques and they rebuild their capital by cheating farmers out of their seemingly valueless goods. Significantly enough, it is the discovery of a cupboard from "before the conquest" which makes their fortune. The Québécois hero has learned to use his roots and the power of money to his own advantage. A new society has been established, not only by defeating the immigrant, but also by defeating the fear of money and business-values of an urban society, a fear which shows up in many of the films of the '40s and '50s. Whether money and business values are really better than the spiritual and human ones of the past is a question open for debate.

In many ways, however, the central focus of the film is not the hero, Florent, but Émile (Guillaume Lemay-Thivierge), the slum child that the couple virtually adopts. On the film's publicity