



• Mary Ann McDonald and Dan Aykroyd in *Love at First Sight*

Maple Laughs: The Canadianization of Popular Comedy

by Geoff Pevere

"We may be cheap and we may be dirty, but we're Canadian."
— from Jack Darcus's *Overnight* (a contemporary Canadian comedy).

"My sperm swim fucking well."
— from Giles Walker's *90 Days* (another contemporary Canadian comedy).

No small task this: to trace, examine and analyze the growth and development of "Canadian humour" in popular media over the past couple of decades. Even putting specific definitional problems temporarily aside (i.e., What's "Canadian"? What's "humour"? Can "funny" be analyzed and stay "funny"?), a virtual horror house of potential hazards and flummoxing ambiguities remains. Besides, as the specificity of Canadian culture itself remains an area more speculated on than mapped out, the consideration of any subdivision therein becomes an exercise fairly destined for storms of contention and inconclusiveness.

Still, certain things can't be denied. Comedy, or at least comedy as manifested in the North American cultural context, has undergone some profound and distinctive developments the past 15 or so years, and Canadians have played an instrumental role in this evolution — nearly every popular recent comedic phenomenon, from the first airing of *Saturday Night Live* in 1975 to David Letterman's contemporary makeover of the talk show, is virtually inconceivable without the participation

of Canadians as key creative collaborators.

But there's more to this apparent Canadianization of popular contemporary comedy than the fortunate presence of a bunch of highly-placed Canucks in the Trojan horse of the Yankee entertainment industry: funny things are happening at home too. Filmwise, 1986 was remarkable not only for its unprecedented cluster of culturally distinguished and artistically mature Canadian works, but for the often profound and always self-conscious humour of those works. Without much perversity of critical double-jointedness, it's perfectly reasonable to interpret *Dancing in the Dark*, *The Decline of the American Empire*, *The Fly*, *Loyalties* and *Sitting in Limbo* as comedies of a sort. Moreover, surely something has happened since the days when Canadian movies endlessly unspooled dreary, snowbound stories of doomed illiterates driving to foreordained failure in beat-up convertibles, C&W wailing tinnily from the car speakers. Maybe not something unequivocally positive or praiseworthy (more on that later) but something too consistent and striking to ignore.

On television, similar silliness has prevailed in our most memorable recent moments. Nobody needs to be reminded about the still-unparalleled, almost eerie, parodic brilliance of SCTV, and if there's anything truly remarkable about last year's otherwise overpraised CBC production of that withered literary chestnut *Anne of Green Gables*, it's that its terminal schmaltziness is always undercut by a cannily ironic (and, for productions of this type, decidedly unusual) sense of humour. *Seeing Things* and *Switchback*, two examples of Canadian programs Canadians actually choose to watch, are high-giggle

quotient shows. And, were it not for the issue of intention (always an essential one in terms of distinguishing comedy from other dramatic forms), *He Shoots, He Scores* would surely qualify as one of the most awesomely funny Canadian TV productions of the age.

So what's happened? Canadians have never been known as a particularly riotous lot. If anything, the favoured stereotypical perception of the Canadian held abroad has been that of a stern, dour, sexless Protestant benumbed to excitement and levity by overgovernment and too many mettletesting winters. Like other saddened, snowbound lands, such as Scandinavia and the Soviet Union, Canada has not been known as a breeder of clowns. If anything, our cultural traditions have tended to the morose and fatalistic. If, as Dame Atwood suggests, mere survival is the principal, distinguishing preoccupation of Canadian literary culture (and thus the collective national subconscious), what's to laugh at?

Certainly, in terms of our sputtering cinematic tradition, this tendency to the bleakly hopeless has been a profound determinant: nearly all the accepted classics of the production 1964-1978 period, including *Le Chat dans le sac*, *Nobody Waved Goodbye*, *Pour la suite du monde*, *Goin' Down the Road*, *La Vraie nature de Bernadette*, *Mon Oncle Antoine*, *Le Vieux pays ou Rimbaud est mort* and *Paperback Hero* (*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, a movie made by the collaborative expatriate sensibilities of Ted Kotcheff and Mordecai Richler, is the conspicuous exception), are characterized by a common, shoulder-sloping defeatism. Each, in its way, is about the futile attempts of an individual to buck either fate or the established order (which, in Canadian terms often

amounts to precisely the same thing). Each suggests happiness, in the high-spirited, heel-kicking Hollywood sense of the term, is impossible. Tranquility, if not serenity, comes from the acceptance of one's lot. Transgressors are always punished and frequently killed.

Yet, before generalizations take hold, a significant distinction needs to be drawn between the traditions of indulgent, fulsome *tristesse* evident in other snowswept cultures — and prominent in the otherwise wildly diverging work of artists such as Chekhov, Strindberg, Munch, Bergman, Dreyer and Tarkovsky (to name but a few of the great northern moaners) — and our own. Unlike our Northern European counterparts, Canadian artists have not been able to establish a richly atavistic tradition of our terminal depression — something which the Swedes, Danish, Norwegians and Russians, bolstered as they are by the depth of history and the culturally-emboldening power of indigenous language, have managed quite nicely. Short both on historical and linguistic traditions, Canada has not erected out of its Northern unhappiness the same protective cultural edifices these other countries have. Thus our resignation has not the authority or sheer depressive assurance of something like the films of Ingmar Bergman or the paintings of Edward Munch — our collective cultural wail, in its timid minor key, comes across like so much whining. Moreover, it is made ridiculous by being uttered in the shadow of the most culturally formidable presence on the planet — a force which, moreover, has acquired an unprecedented international currency by trading in prefabricated positivism; that is, by manufacturing and exporting *good feelings*.

Ironically, the incalculable presence

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and impact of mass-produced American positivism has had a peculiarly enriching and even distinguishing effect on homegrown cultural (particularly pop cultural) activity. It has lent to our fiction-making endeavours an ambivalent sense of anger and envy that has hardened and combined into a near-pathological and inter-coastal sense of detachment and alienation, and it's precisely this sense of being on the outside looking in that, more than anything, has defined and explained the malaise soaking through so much Canadian culture. Indeed, one is tempted to say that malaise *is* Canadian culture.

Well *was*. For, as strong philosophical similarities once bound the otherwise-diverse Canadian films of the Great Gray period, there are thick bonds holding together the various manifestations of contemporary Canadian comedy. Not only that, these ties bind both periods: given that alienation is only a short skip from irony, one can easily interpret our current comedy as the legitimate child of our former fatalism.

Perhaps nothing has encapsulated this movement from the morbidly futile to the smirkingly self-conscious than a simple, epiphanic skit once performed on the now sadly defunct SCTV program. Presented in the context of a deliriously bang-on spoof of CBC television (including a *Hinterland Who's Who?* parody that asked: *Who Cares?*), the standout sketch was a take-off on that *echt* slice of cinematic Canadiana, Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road*. A recession-age reworking of the story of a pair of uneducated Maritimers whose dreams of prosperity crash on the sidewalks of Toronto, the SCTV answer featured two duck-tailed, moon-baying unemployed Newfie professionals (John Candy and Joe Flaherty) heading for Toronto in search of "doctorin' and lawyerin' jobs." As parody, the piece was ruthlessly thorough, right down to the Tom Connors haircuts and Shebib's signature moments of prolonged, speechless silence between characters. And as evidence of cultural distance travelled, it was nothing short of apocalyptic – the translation of one era's predominant pop-cultural mode into the terms of another's. Stylistically, it heralded both the current movement of Canadian popular culture from docudramatic realism to hermetically-sealed parody (a logical if not necessary movement, given that both imply a gulf of non-judgmental detachment between observer and subject), and the general switch from tears to jeers.

If the close proximity of alienation to irony is feasible, this shift in cultural tone from self-defeating fatalism to insouciant ridicule is perhaps a necessary condition of Canadian cultural survival: given that out-and-out positivism is practically impossible in a country permanently doomed to confront the funhouse reflection of its own cultural, economic and military puniness, ironic detachment is the only logical alternative (mass suicide being illegal and

therefore not attractive to Canadians).

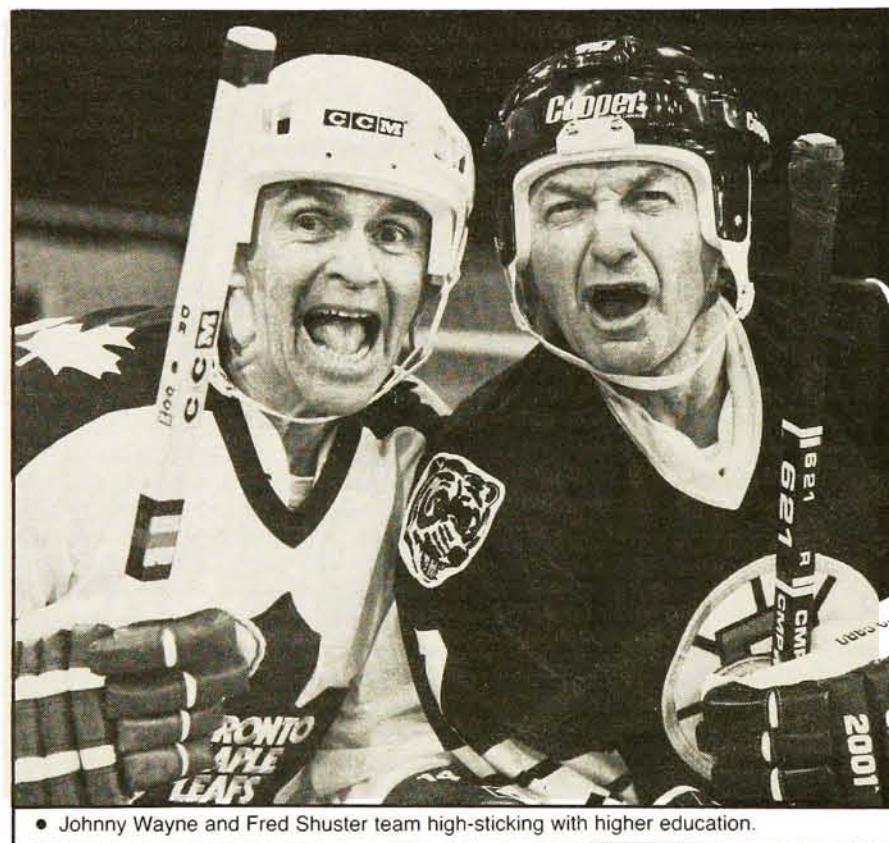
This also means the Canadian impulse to irony must have been around, in some permutation or another, as long as the impulse to alienation has (that is, if "impulse to alienation" isn't oxymoronic). And, in the terms of this writer's thirtyish, TV-pickled Southern Ontario recollection, it has: while I quite vividly remember wincing in my flannel jammies each time Ed Sullivan patronizingly introduced Wayne and Shuster as something like the "clowns from Canada" (at the time, I didn't think they were funny and therefore found their status as Canadian entertainment emissaries somewhat appalling), I have since found profound respect for their comedic prescience: Wayne and Shuster's specialty was the movie and TV

Canadian Air Farce is further, time-tested, testimony to the Canadian knack for the bull's-eye raspberry.

But there's something sinister afoot in all this yucking-it-up. The rise to pop-cult prominence of Canadian humour has coincided with a general shift in the tone of North American popular comedy, which has in turn coincided with the larger rightward ideological drift of the past decade. This is not to say that, by definition, the parodic alacrity so evident in Canadian comedy necessarily demonstrates a deep-seated, latent Canadian Reaganism (despite the damning proof offered by our own latent Reagan, Brian Mulroney), but the coincidence between the current state of comedy in general, the nature and success of Canadian comedy in particular, and the cur-

Without a doubt, the most significant event in the growth and development of contemporary comedy was the launching of *Saturday Night Live* on NBC in 1975. Overpraised as it was and destitute as it now is, SNL was more than just a TV boot camp for the ensuing decade's movie stars (including Chevy Chase, Dan Ackroyd, Bill Murray, Martin Short, John Belushi and Eddie Murphy): it represented the first popular expression of a type of comedy that was almost totally media-reflexive. The first postmodern comedy show (the remarkable Ernie Kovacs excluded), SNL made TV, movies – and pop culture in general – its almost exclusive satirical domain. And small wonder: these were also the first creative emissions and burps from a generation of performers who had literally grown up with the media they satirized. While that made the SNL collective the most deliriously effective popculture parodists of their age (a status quite handily assumed by SCTV when it went network in 1981), it also put severe limitations on the range of what they were and were not able to do: with fascinating and telling consistency, no performers from the SNL stable have lived up to their smallscreen potential after moving on to big screen and bright lights. On a satiric level, the TV-intensive nature of the program's satirical barbs has had profound political consequences on contemporary popular comedy: principally, an easy detachment from the expression of anything critical outside of the sitting duck parameters of popular culture and, more insidiously, the ascension of insouciance (a.k.a. smarmy, superior detachment), as the principal defining characteristic of the prevailing comic mode. These days, smirky non-commitment is heroic (see *Ghostbusters* and *Beverly Hills Cop*), hugely funny and immensely marketable.

This media-centered, ironic what-me-worryism is the governing, schtick-binding attitude of *Ghostbusters*, Letterman, Murphy and Rivers. Each exercises denial, superiority and 'Us-Agin-Them' condescension as a veritable comic m.o. Each trades in various forms of clay-pigeon slaughter by pitting the superior wit-making abilities of the comedian against someone suitably serious, stupid or simply uncomprehending (e.g., Letterman's guerrilla tactic streeters – he's Geraldo Rivera with wisecracks – Rivers' constant character attacks on absent celebrities, Murphy's aggressive sexism and homophobia, and chief Ghostbuster Bill Murray's deflation of the horrors of the unknown with an ever-ready supply of disarming schtick: "He slimed me. Boy, do I feel funky."). Each is an expression of the xenophobic cultural centrism that is a virtual governing principle of the Reagan administration – anything different or not aligned in the centre is fair game for media ridicule, if not (in the case of Grenada, Libya or Nicaragua) outright military aggression – and each would be nearly inconceiva-



• Johnny Wayne and Fred Shuster team high-sticking with higher education.

spoof, a mode that two decades hence would virtually define the terms of Canadian comic expertise. I recall also the aloof, smug irreverence of David Steinberg, whose sniping, "anti-establishment" contributions to the old *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* played no small part in the eventual yanking of the show from the CBC roster. Writer-producer Chris Bearde, a regular on Canadian talk shows from the late-'60s to late-'70s because of his profoundly emblematic status as a successful Canuck in Hollywood (one of our nation's most durable heroic archetypes), was instrumental in the creation of that primordial classic of self-destructive (if not just self-destructive) postmodern TV nihilism, *The Gong Show*: For year after baffling year, Canadians Gordie Tapp and Don Harron figured prominently on the pale country and western answer to *Laugh-in, Hee Haw*: On radio, the delirious parodic heights reached by *The Royal*

rent ideological climate must be addressed – if only to determine the extent to which the True North Strong and Free can be implicated in (or hopefully distinguished from) the nasty forms of comedy currently sitting smugly at the top.

Four of the more currently popular comedy phenomena typify the contemporary state of the art of funnymaking: *Ghostbusters*, *Late Night With David Letterman*, Eddie Murphy and Joan Rivers. Individually, these pretty well cover the waterfront of potential outlets for comedy, including movies, TV, radio, standup, records, videocassettes and even (if anybody still gets the old-fashioned urge to read), books. Collectively however, they represent a startling uniformity of attitude and approach. And each, significantly, has a pronounced Canadian creative component. But before we map out the current terrain, some thoughts on how we arrived here.

ble without the creative participation of Canadians: Dan Ackroyd and Ivan Reitman on *Ghostbusters*, Toronto's Mark Breslin as the chief comedy consultant for Joan Rivers' show; Eddie Murphy's SNL apprenticeship; the presence of Thunder Bay's finest and smarriest son, Paul Schaffer, as musician and creative collaborator, on *Late Night With David Letterman*.

And small wonder: as American popular culture has increasingly adopted an attitude of defensive detachment as a strategy for euphemistically deflating the constant threat of both internal and external disharmony (for as *The Village Voice's* J. Hoberman noted about the apocalyptic, God-summoning climax of Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*: trouble can't hurt you if you look the other way), the tried-and-true, culturally-entrenched Canadian attitude of cultural alienation has become eminently bankable and enlistable to the neo-conservative cause. Ironically, we've been put to work dispensing irony in the service of the very cultural industry that once, in its refusal to allow us Canadians to join in on the fun, made us such a wryly sarcastic race in the first place.

(Interestingly enough, CBC-TV has provided recent proof, thanks to an execrably dim-witted show called *We Don't Knock*, that this process has come full circle, and that we're now getting back, in its cheapest and most thoughtless form, the fallout from the kind of comedy we've so successfully exported southwards. Taking as its model the ugliest regular element of the David Letterman show – when the host goes into the street, armed with microphone and camera crew in order to harass unsuspecting passersby – *We Don't Knock* has built an *entire show* out of exploiting the natural disadvantage of people unprepared for media assault: every week, hosts Howard Busgang and Shawn Thompson – who together lend new depth to the word 'smarmy' – barge into places in order to make fun of people less witty and composed than they are. Funny.)

Ultimately, what's disheartening about this co-optation of Canadian comedy modes into neo-con American pop culture is not just that (once again) it places Canadian cultural expression in terms of a regressive political ideology, nor even that it might imply a pre-existent Canadian sympathy with that ideology (it's a profoundly specious political conceit – or maybe wishful thinking – to assume that Canadian necessarily implies Un-American), but that it almost always results in a substantial depletion of the creative powers of the Canadians co-opted: SNL's Ackroyd is the only original cast Canuck to maintain a consistently high (if not particularly bright) public profile, while ex-Torontonian Gilda Radner has seemingly been doomed to playing second banana to husband Gene Wilder in such flaccid Wilder-directed vehicles as *The Woman in Red* and *Haunted Honey-*



• Meatball's à la Porky's



• Bachar Chbib's Waters-y Memoirs

moon. (This may have as much to do with a celebrity-making system peculiarly more approving of male than female comics as anything else – witness also the disparity between the post-SCTV profiles of the show's men and women – but it doesn't explain the depletion of Canadian comic juices that seem always to accompany the process of moving from smallscreen sketch-making to bigscreen megastardom. Then again, maybe it's just coke.)

In addition to Ackroyd, none of the finest contemporary Canadian funnypersons have borne out the promise of their early careers after making the leap: Eugene Levy – one of SCTV's most prolific and fearless collaborators – is apparently unacceptable unless flailing in the ample shadow of John Candy (*Going Berserk*, *Splash*, *Armed and Dangerous*); Rick Moranis, another creepily chameleon-like character satirist, has acquired a dubious star status by playing a gallery of nerds in obesely-budgeted FX extravaganzas such as *Ghostbusters*, *Streets of Fire* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Dave Thomas is now exclusively employed as a TV hawk for everything from phone calls to hamburgers, and Catherine O'Hara, possibly the most inventive female comic talent of the age, has become virtually invisible (notwithstanding her unfortunate appearances opposite Thomas pitching Ontario horseracing). As for Martin Short, who's done double-duty on both SCTV and SNL, it's too early to tell – although *Three Amigos*, his first Big Movie, isn't much to hang high hopes on. Howie Mandel, a standup comic turned primetime actor (*St. Elsewhere*), will probably be remembered, if remembered at all, as a primetime actor.

But it's somewhat shortsighted (not to say typically Canadian) to assess the entire state of Canadian comedy on the basis of those few practitioners with either the clout to Go Hollywood or even the failed ambitions to do so. It is also somewhat typical of our slope-shouldered, mopey national character to study an indigenous cultural phenomenon (something called Canadian comedy) almost entirely as it is manifested in American cultural terms (much as we'd like to claim it, *Saturday Night Live* isn't ours – *Check it Out* and *Hangin' In*, on the other hand, are). While in comedy terms, this looking elsewhere for affirmation of our own cultural vitality is somewhat more justified than it would be in terms of art and literature (which isn't to say it isn't done), it still risks excluding some fascinating – if less media-magnified – signs of comic life quite happily settled north of the 49th.

While the almost total lack of a Canadian comic tradition (I hear you: but Stephen Leacock does not constitute a *tradition*) has necessitated the southward migration of much of Canada's finest TV comedy talent, there's been a fascinating surge of contentedly homegrown Canadian visual comedy of late.

And what's even more interesting, given the lie-down-and-die determinism and bleakness that has characterized Canadian cinema since nobody waved goodbye, this surge – small and pink as it is – has taken place on film.

Over the past few years, a veritable bumper crop of low-budget, independent and regionally-produced films has appeared that cleverly testify to both the indigenously and integrity of the peculiarly postmodern mode of contemporary Canadian humour. For those filmmakers working outside of the dominant entertainment industry channels (which means slightly more, but not much, than working outside of Toronto), many of the same forces which have shaped our film and literary traditions, as well as our currently popular contributions to TV comedy, have been at work, but in significantly different ways. Thus, while a common sensitivity to our exclusion from the big cocktail party of North American culture is a principal source of comic and creative fuel for a truly significant number of recently-produced Canadian indies, it shows up in far uglier and angrier forms than it does in the temperate confines of the mainstream. But the media-reinforced sense of collective cultural alienation that is a narrow-deep determinant of the contemporary Canadian sensibility, and which has lately shifted in tone of expression from sober fatalism to detached irony, speaks with far more direction and urgency in the comparatively uncompromised independent realm. It also binds, on a political level, an otherwise formally and geographically disparate group of films into a semblance – albeit an entirely legit one – of cultural solidarity.

Not only do each of these films have a shared object of critical concern – the schizophrenic effects of longterm exposure to cultural transmissions not of, but more familiar than, one's own – they are bound by a method of attack: satirical derision. Some noteworthy examples:

- Made in Vancouver over the course of a decade, **Amerika**, Al Razutis's epic deconstruction (through juxtaposition) of American adspeak, is really just a post-semiotic comedy: by placing coy, lipsmackingly sexist TV ads alongside raunchy hardcore clips, the subtext of the former is hilariously – shall we say it? – laid bare;

- Formally more conventional but conceptually every bit as mischievous, Bachar Chbib's pair of Montreal-made melodramas, **Memoirs** and **Evisxon**, borrow heavily from familiar American film and TV dramatic conventions in order to amplify them to the point of blaring, obnoxious transparency. Sort of a Rainer Werner Fassbinder fused with John Waters, Chbib underlines the difference between Their mindset and Ours by emphasizing the cracks and hinges, instead of the flow and design, of narrative structure;

- Winnipeg's deliriously inventive John Paizs, author of three short films



• The SCTV gang – Martin Short, Andrea Martin, Joe Flaherty and Eugene Levy.

and one near-perfect feature (**Crime Wave**), could be conveniently catalogued as Canada's Peewee Herman, but that would make one point while missing another. True, Paizs' unshakeable, gee-whiz fascination with the most pervasive and idyllically complacent forms of American pop culture, such as sitcom and Walt Disney, would make him a comfortable constituent of **Peewee's Playhouse** (as would his similarly infantile screen persona), but the real edge of Paizs' work, its patina of nightmare and dread, is unimaginable in the pop-eyed, endlessly agog terms of the world according to Peewee. Moreover, it's what makes the work peculiarly Canadian: in all of Paizs' films, the wonder of the perfect world suggested by American popular culture is shot through with a constantly lurking sense of horror and danger. In fact, David Lynch's **Blue Velvet**, much-lauded and Ten-Bested for its so-called "unprecedented" juxtaposition of psychotic sexual dementia and Andy Hardy hokum, merely echoes a formal and intellectual strategy elementary to each of Paizs' films so far. But nobody's heard of him.

Two other recent Canadian comedies use elementary sitcom structures – if with less pure, postmodern spaciness than Paizs – to send up the chronic and culturally-entrenched impotence and detachment of Canadian males. Atom Egoyan's **Next of Kin**, the story of the dissipated son of Toronto money who

imposes himself on a grieving Lebanese family as their long, lost boy, suggests that the lachrymose condition of the nation's male is the result of inalterable, familiarly-imposed social constraints. Once Peter, the hero, has traded the sterile, sparsely-furnished environs of his parents' North York home for the overdecorated coziness of his newly-found ethnic family, he turns into a regular up-and-at-'em kind of guy. Giles Walker's **90 Days** (a National Film Board production, and therefore "independent" in another way entirely) is similarly sitcom in scope and structure, but it places the ineffective nebbishness of its lovelorn protagonists in an explicitly post-feminism context. Alex and Blue – possibly the only "buddy movie" heroes in the genre's history who can't stand each other – are each driven to their respective predicaments (Blue to mail-order a bride, Alex to sell his sperm) because of a total inability to deal with women as independent, free-thinking entities. Rather than stay in bed and work it out, these guys hide underneath.

Finally, from Canada's far east has recently rumbled possibly the most original and pointed statement the post-modern Canadian comic sensibility (and a virtual last word on the alienated Canadian movie male), Mike and Andy Jones' epiphanically inventive **The Adventure of Faustus Bidgood**. A near-psychedelic first-person account of the fevered imagination of a minor provin-

cial civil servant (Andy Jones) day-dreaming his appointment as the first President of the People's Republic of Newfoundland, **Faustus** effectively functions as a bridge between the old, drearily defeatist Canadian cultural condition (with its preoccupation on the suffering of the profoundly alienated, terminally repressed and permanently adolescent Canadian male) and the new, confidently self-reflexive satirical sensibility. With his penchant for fantasies of the predominantly pornographic and sadistic variety, his chronic inability to comprehend or act upon his social and political environment, and his petulant refusal to go for his only shot at bucking his Canadian lot and actually Being Somebody, Faustus Bidgood is the ultimate incarnation of a lineage of losers that include films like **Nobody Waved Goodbye** and **The Rowdyman** (also made and set in Faustus territory, Newfoundland), **Goin' Down the Road** and **Paperback Hero**. The significant difference – the one which makes **Faustus Bidgood** nothing less than a landmark testament to the state and direction of contemporary Canadian culture – is that fact that this time, it's done just for laughs.

But is this new Canadian jokiness, scattershot across media and borders though it may be, something worth hoisting the flags of cultural independence for? Can we call it our own? Or look at it and see something that is uncontestedly us? Hard to say, since, like so many so-named indigenous Canadian cultural traditions – such as landscape painting, crossover heavy metal music, documentary filmmaking and novels about being clobbered by hardship – this one was borne of something less active than reactive in the Canadian cultural psyche.

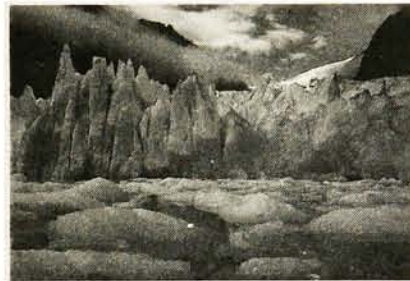
Rarely the authors of our own cultural destiny, frequently just spectators to the great march of North American history, Canadians have managed something altogether unique under the grim circumstances: we've made cultural traditions out of cultural exclusion and alienation. In terms of narrative film (and non-narrative too, but that's another story), this has meant the startlingly persistent expression of a solipsistic anguish – movies that are all road and no destination.

In the new Canadian humour, with its emphasis on deadpan media parody (a particularly effective way of distinguishing US from Them), the solipsism has found another level of articulation: looking into the big window of American culture, we're able to laugh at our own reflections pressed snotty-nosed against the glass. Sure, it's still a defensive and reactive mechanism at work, but maybe that very defensiveness ultimately has more to do with knowing the character of the beaver than we'd care to admit.

It's a classic study in classroom behaviour, writ real large: the kids who told the best jokes were usually those most terrified of being joked about.

photo: Rick Alexander

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