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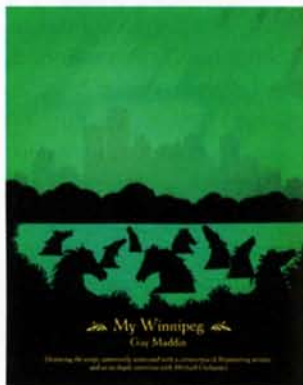
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THE ARCADIA PROJECT

BY ERIK MORSE



"I was born on the 28th of February, 1956, at old Grace Hospital," Canadian archdirector Guy Maddin muses in the new publication *My Winnipeg* (Coach House Press, \$27.95). "Fifty years later, after the end of a long relationship with a girlfriend, I found myself...right across the street from the old Grace. Nice to know that in half a century, much of that time spent planning my escape from Winnipeg, I'd ended up precisely 100 feet from my birthplace." With a homesick lament as earnest and tender as that of Proust's in *Swann's Way*, Guy Maddin returns to Winnipeg, his greatest inspiration, with a novelization of his acclaimed 2007 *docu-fantasia* of the same title. As an artist whose cinematic exposition of "home" has resulted from a "mapping" of individual

and collective childhood fantasies, Maddin's most recent turn toward the written word allows him to pursue a cartography of manifold genres. These include an annotated screenplay of the original film, photographs, doodles, interviews and various other textual bricolage, all of which gives *My Winnipeg* the aura of both scrapbook and atlas.

A fabulist of Winnipeg's subterranean plat, the author's unique voice — at times both diagnostic and operatic, defender and defamer — shares a common style with Walter Benjamin, whose orotund atlas of Paris known as *The Arcades Project* is an archetype for Maddin's enchanting *dérive*. "It always made sense to developers to build on a grid system, but there were these rivers which screwed the grid along its banks, so the city more closely resembles, when viewed from above, a plate with a few waffles randomly dealt out on it, minus the syrup," Maddin explains of his spatial mapping of Winnipeg, striking a distinctively Benjaminian tone. "...I imagine yet more grids, perhaps subterranean, which would reveal a drop-shadow map of the same streets above... and then another thousand grids — conceptual ones — that intersect each street at right angles...and then why not another plate of invisible waffles hovering above Winnipeg, a faint echo of the streets below."

Like the minor histories that typify Benjamin's circuitous passages, Maddin's *My Winnipeg* builds upon the miniature demiworlds and urban legends that flow beneath the grid of a city's official heritage. Thus, within *My Winnipeg's* desultory archives, Maddin recounts the 1914 opening of the Panama Canal (and its deleterious effects on central Canada's status as a transcontinental trade hub) alongside the simultaneous blinding of Maddin's father by a misplaced broach pin; the founding of Happyland, a collection of shanties which reside on the rooftops of the city's tallest buildings in order to keep the homeless out of sight; or the popular mayor's campaign promise to seal the entire city under a vast plastic dome.

Maddin succeeds brilliantly in this underworld tour of "Back Lanes, Sleepwalkers & Heart-sick Architecture" largely because of *My Winnipeg's* dimensional style. While the columnar orientation of the text allows the author's rich prose to burst from the page in contoured skyline swathes, the use of footnoting conversely draws the reader deeper into the city's velvety heart. As with *The Arcades*, Maddin is resolutely focused on the interior world — houses, trains, department stores, arenas and secretive offices of the elite — as the most poetic of spaces. Winnipeggers have long-suffered a frost-induced agoraphobia in which the home plays the dual role of dwelling and hearth, explains the author. "There are days in the winter when no one goes out unnecessarily...lest we die of exposure." What this produces in the pages of *My Winnipeg* is a fetish of the threshold, or the exploration of worlds within worlds, to paraphrase Benjamin. Maddin goes so far as to include a floor plan of his childhood home at 800 Ellice Street, including the locations of the family television and toys, and a detailed recollection of the house's persnickety hallrunner. In Maddin's screwball imagination, the house stands in as a miniature dream museum of Winnipeg just as the city is itself a giant house to be wandered through and discovered.

Included as an addendum is a lengthy interview with fellow Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje, which provides an excellent introduction for Maddin novices. Their perambulating conversation frames the director's recent work within a larger cinematic and literary canon.

TEACHING ABROAD

BY MELISSA SILVESTRI

India has Bollywood, and Nigeria has Nollywood — two examples of international film industries that have thrived outside of Hollywood, and soon, perhaps, Haiti can be added to that list. In the port city of Jacmel, considered the cultural capital of Haiti, is the Ciné Institute, which is steadily instilling film schools in the country's young film students.

The school had its origins as a film festival in 2004. The Jacmel Film Festival, founded by filmmaker David Belle and artist Patrick Bourcard, showed international films annually for free to thousands of Haitians. After three years, the festival's popularity spurred interest in further developing Haiti's own film industry, and a school called the Ciné Institute was started, where young students could learn technical and creative skills in filmmaking and then use it to earn a living, support their families and drive local economic growth.

With a donation by advisory board members Francis Ford Coppola and Paul Haggis, the school has imported many teachers including screenwriter-director-journalist-editor Annie Nocenti, who teaches short filmmaking. After visiting Belle in Haiti, Nocenti was invited to the Ciné Institute a year and a half ago. "[David] brought all these movies to Haiti, and his dream was to put cameras in the hands of Haitians so they could tell the stories they want to tell," Nocenti says. "People have this portrait of Haiti that it is all slums, and it's not true. I was one of the first teachers, in screenwriting, but I'm just one of many. David has been the driving force of the whole thing."

In the past year, Nocenti's students have completed six short films, premiered four this past June, and this September she will return to teach feature screenwriting as well as short filmmaking to the 25 new fall arrivals. Of her experiences with her students, she says she tries to build trust with young people who may be naturally shy toward newcomers but enthusiastic about developing their filmmaking skills. If the Ciné Institute's project is a success, the future of Haitian film could be promising. "We believe filmmaking can reduce poverty," says Belle. "We want to empower Haiti's talented youth to create a vibrant local industry, based on a super low budget and fast track production model."

Learn more at cineinstitute.com.