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**Making Spectacle of Taste:
The Cultural Implications
of the Academy and Genie Awards
by
Gillian Roberts, B.A. (Hons.), M.A.**

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

17 February, 2000

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**The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis**

**Making Spectacle of Taste: The Cultural Implications
of the Academy and Genie Awards**

Submitted by Gillian Roberts, B.A. Honours (Victoria) M.A. English (Carleton)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts.

Priscilla Walton, Thesis Supervisor

Bryan Gillingham, Director: SSAC

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

This study examines the cultural phenomenon of awards shows in relation to the Hollywood and Canadian film industries. The spectacle of the awards shows is a reflection of and reflected in the films they celebrate. While both the Academy and Genie Awards are implicated in constructing the industries they support, their success in winning the consent of the viewing public differs. The Academy Awards, with the most globally recognized awards show spectacle, one which upholds middle-brow tastes, contrast sharply with Canada's considerably lower profile Genie Awards and their bid to present Canadian film as a national and art cinema. A comparison of the Oscars and the Genies, and of their Best Picture winners for 1997—*Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, respectively—illuminates the distinctions between Hollywood and Canadian film where both taste and spectacle are concerned. But intersections of the two awards shows, and these two films, complicate the relationship between the Hollywood and Canadian film industries: James Cameron, director of *Titanic*, is Canadian; and *The Sweet Hereafter* received two Academy Award nominations. Thus, the comparison of the Oscars and Genies reveals a cultural overlap that maintains and exemplifies a relationship of interdependence.

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Introduction

“Why do observers persist in writing about awards as if they should make logical sense?” —Jay Scott¹

This study attempts to glean some “sense”—logical or otherwise—from the current awards show phenomenon in popular culture, with a particular focus on its relation to the Hollywood and Canadian film industries. Awards shows cover a large span of entertainment media, including, but not limited to, film, television, theatre, music, and music video; moreover, each medium has several awards shows that celebrate it. Whether these awards are bestowed by academy members, the industry as a whole, the public as voters, or the public through sales numbers, certain elements are common to virtually every awards show. In essence, each awards ceremony—however opulent, irreverent, or minimalist it might be—functions as a celebration and promotion of cultural products; this celebration takes the form of spectacle as nominees and winners are put on display for the viewing public. Who decides what is worthy of celebration and the rhetoric of what is the “best” invoke issues of taste. And because these awards shows typically celebrate people already in the public eye, stars have become a central component of the awards show spectacle.

The expansive presence of awards shows leads to the question, “Does anyone actually care about the more than 60 awards shows throughout the year?” (Lindlaw B4). The proliferation of these spectacles continues, in spite of views that “[t]he shows themselves begin to cheapen each other” (qtd. B4). If awards shows are being rendered invalid by too much competition, why do they continue to air on television? In a sense, celebration of cultural products becomes a competition in itself, for “[a]s people become more blasé, it becomes more and more imperative to try to capture attention with some new

fuss or another” (qtd. B4). The notion of “cheapening” these presentations is evidence of an awards show hierarchy, with the Academy Awards at the top:

The Academy folks turn up their noses at the likes of the Soap Opera Digest Awards, Premiere’s Readers Poll awards, Digital Hollywood Awards and Television Movie Awards, not to mention the Peoples’ Choice Awards or the Saturn Awards honoring science fiction films. (B4)

Part of the hierarchy involves what type of cultural products are being celebrated; for instance, it is no surprise that the Soap Opera Digest Awards, celebrating a much-maligned television genre, do not rank anywhere near the Academy Awards. But the Soap Opera Digest Awards are also voted by readers of *Soap Opera Digest*, thus placing the awards lower on the hierarchy than the Daytime Emmy Awards, which honour the same programmes. In turn, the Daytime Emmy Awards are considerably lower in status than their Prime-Time counterparts.

While virtually all awards shows involve some kind of voting process, there is a tension between this aspect of democracy and the elitism of celebrating select individuals or works; this tension increases in comparing awards shows where the public constitutes the voters with those where the industry itself, or a select academy, declares nominees and winners. In general, the public is afforded less credibility than members of an entertainment industry. In cases where industry members constitute the awards’ voting body, winners often claim that the highest honour has come from their peers; this rhetoric of gratitude must necessarily shift at awards shows such as the People’s Choice Awards, where fans are acknowledged for keeping an actor or television programme in business, or for ensuring the box-office success of a particular film.

There is often a disparity between awards shows that celebrate the same cultural products, depending on who constitutes the voting body. This disparity reveals differences in taste, which in turn points back to the voters: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (Bourdieu 6). Some voting bodies, such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, are perceived as more "legitimate" than others in their bestowal of honours; the Academy thus enjoys "[t]he authorized speech of status-generated competence" (413), one that is not granted to the general viewing public. But the Academy, widely recognized as having middle-brow preferences, is not perceived as "legitimate" by its critics, often those with more art-house or high-brow tastes. In this sense, the Academy's classifications, through the Oscars, do indeed classify the Academy in relation to taste. Further, the popularity of the Academy Awards televised presentation attests to its affinity with the viewing public, at least in terms of matching middle-brow expectations. That the Academy Awards should celebrate high-profile films and stage a high-profile ceremony underlines the fact that awards shows themselves are cultural products, integral to the circulation of popular culture.

Not surprisingly, then, stars are a fixture of any awards show that can realistically hope for success with the television viewing audience. Indeed, star power is an acknowledged component of awards show popularity: "People like to watch people. People like to stargaze" (qtd. in Oswald B1). The fact that awards shows can be "essentially divided into two categories: the Oscars, and the rest" has a great deal to do with celebrity presence: "They really depend on pure megastar power. The magnitude of the stars overwhelms everything else, and in that regard they don't have to do much to get people to watch" (qtd. B1). Celebrity status itself is in many ways similar to awards shows.

Like awards, which must be voted upon, “[t]he artificial-manufacture story [of celebrity] also offers a strange new interplay between hierarchy and egalitarian democracy”; for while celebrity sets stars apart from the public, “stardom is more accessible” than traditional class status, “since the inborn requirements are fewer” (Gamson 54). Further, “celebrities are treated, if not as a traditional power elite, as an elite with the power to anoint, however briefly” (132); surely, the bestowal of awards is yet another gesture of anointing those deemed worthy.

Similarly, awards shows with star power are deemed worthy of watching. Most of the observations made above speak to the awards show phenomenon as it is manifest in American popular culture; what of its Canadian counterpart? Comparisons of Canadian and American culture are complicated by the fact that American popular culture is virtually the domestic culture of the Canadian viewing public; thus, awards shows in Canada, celebrating Canadian culture, perform different functions than their American cousins. Taste becomes infused with a national(ist) urgency in an attempt to prescribe Canadian identity to Canadians. Bourdieu analyzes taste according to class and educational distinctions: “Taste is thus the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic expression of a particular class of conditions of existence” (175). Taste, therefore, forms part of the project of class dominance. Such a formulation must be somewhat re-articulated when examining the dominance of nations, particularly the perceived cultural imperialism of the United States as far as Canada is concerned. For if taste “functions as a sort of social orientation, a ‘sense of one’s place’” (467), what implications does taste have for Canadians’ self-orientation in terms of nation? The popular culture consumed by Canadians is overwhelmingly American, thereby

complicating the “sense of place” afforded by taste. In this sense, cultural celebration in Canada functions to “return” Canadians to their own sense of place (if such a sense can be presupposed to have existed).² Consequently, Canada’s “national awards program” not only provides “an incentive for artists to work towards” (Lyons B1), but it also functions to reassure the Canadian viewing public that there is, indeed, something to celebrate about Canadian culture. While these Canadian awards shows play a part in the assertion of Canadian national identity, it is the American tradition of the Academy Awards that functions as point of reference for Canadian awards programs, the Genie Awards in particular. Discussions of Canadian awards shows, therefore, cannot take place in isolation; their relationship to American popular culture is an essential part of the ways in which they operate.

This study focuses on the relationship between American and Canadian popular culture by specifically examining the Academy and Genie Awards. The degree of spectacle in these awards shows is a reflection of and reflected in the films they celebrate. The Academy Awards, the most globally recognized awards show spectacle, contrast sharply with Canada’s considerably lower profile film awards. *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, the Oscar and Genie Best Picture winners for 1997, provide a case study for further exploration of the interdependence of American and Canadian culture. Apart from the vast differences revealed by comparing these two awards celebrations and these two films, their intersections complicate the relationship between the Hollywood and Canadian film industries: not only is James Cameron, *Titanic*’s director, Canadian, but *The Sweet Hereafter* was also nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Director at the

Academy Awards. The Oscars' status as point of reference for the film industry, then, is qualified by such intersections.

The first chapter of this study examines the Academy Awards, beginning with the genesis of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Academy's involvement in labour disputes. The Academy's vested interests in the Hollywood film industry reveal the Academy Awards to be anything but impartial. The Academy's function of guiding the taste of the viewing public is also explored, with particular emphasis on the Oscars' largely middle-brow selections. Taste not only constitutes a significant part of the Academy Award winners and nominees, but it is also included in the discourse surrounding the Academy Awards show, which routinely comes under fire from television critics. The Oscar show provides an opportunity for the Academy, and the larger Hollywood industry, to project itself to the world, often with a focus on glamour; but such projections are carefully constructed. America also figures in these projections: with a global audience of one billion people, the Academy Awards figure as a spectacular advertisement for American values. But these values and constructions are not always coherent, as the various political protests at the Oscars over the years have suggested. However unintentionally, the Academy Awards do provide a platform for multiple and competing voices.

The second chapter discusses James Cameron's *Titanic*, both on its own terms and in relation to the Academy Awards for 1997. The discourse of excess surrounding the film encompasses not only its budget and its gross, but also the film's production values and its success at the Academy Awards. While the film portrays the sinking of *Titanic* in spectacular fashion, its genre is a hybrid one that includes both disaster or action film

elements as well as those of a period piece. This duality of genre in the film complements a duality of gendered narrative, as *Titanic* vacillates between masculine and feminine narratives.³ Because of *Titanic*'s blockbuster status, it occupies a curious position where taste is concerned; but the film's sanctioning by the Academy Awards, as well as references to visual art within the film's narrative, work to elevate the film's own status. The glamour of the Gilded Age depicted in the film increases *Titanic*'s visual pleasure; in many ways, the film is a perfect match for Hollywood's construction of glamour. The film's overwhelming success at the Academy Awards suggests that it is the quintessential Hollywood film, and its success symbolized Hollywood's reclaiming of the Academy Awards after a year in which independent films were particularly strong; however, James Cameron's Canadian birth and citizenship might complicate the equation of *Titanic* with American values.

The third chapter turns to the Canadian film industry with an exploration of the Genie Awards. The awards' origins as the Canadian Film Awards are examined, along with the status of the film industry as reflected by the awards and ceremonies themselves. While fiction feature filmmaking has had a small presence in Canadian cinema for most of the twentieth century, the Canadian Film Awards and the Genies nevertheless exhibit emulation of the Academy Awards, which are almost entirely devoted to fiction features. Ironically, Oscar-emulation exists alongside the CFAs' and Genies' attempts to assert a Canadian culture distinct from American culture. The celebration of cultural products in Canada contribute to an ideological project: that of constructing a national identity, often in opposition to America. In the celebration of Canadian film, this project has taken the form of constructing Canadian cinema as a national and art cinema. The Genies, as a

platform of celebration, provide much less spectacle than the Academy Awards; the difference between the two awards ceremonies exemplifies the gap between the Canadian and Hollywood film industries. But the Genies have been far less consistent in their presentation of the film industry than have their American counterparts, owing in part to shifting perceptions of the Canadian film industry.

The fourth chapter examines Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter*, a film many Canadian critics have viewed as a pivotal one in the development of English-Canadian feature filmmaking, one that might be largely responsible for the changing image of Canadian cinema. It is the film's two Academy Award nominations, and the global (particularly American) recognition implied therein, which have granted so much status to this film. In contrast, *The Sweet Hereafter*'s recognition at the Cannes Film Festival and the Genie Awards has proven much less influential. This chapter examines the film not only as a text, but also in relation to the Academy and Genie Awards, as well as to *Titanic*. Similarities between the two films at the level of narrative include the focus on a traumatic accident and the foregrounding of memory; but the ways in which the films present these narrative elements provide a great deal of contrast. The presence of *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter* at the awards shows that celebrated them also reveals vast differences between the film industries they have been said to represent; but the fact that these two films intersected at all suggests that distinctions are not as uncomplicated as they initially appear.

Notes

1. "Genie nominees cut ties with the past." Globe and Mail 18 Mar. 1988: C1.
2. The CBC television slogan, "Television to call our own," fits neatly into this agenda.
3. I use the terms "masculine" and "feminine" in their conventional sense, to refer to narratives that have been traditionally directed at either male or female spectators.

Chapter One

All That Glitters Should Be Oscar:

A Taste for America at the Academy Awards

Since 1929, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has doled out awards for cinema achievement. Since 1953, the Academy Awards annual presentation has been televised, allowing the public to look in on “the most glamorous event in the world” (Egoyan, “Diary” 62). A thorough analysis of the Academy Awards must examine both the awards themselves and the spectacle of the awards presentation. Of prime importance is the relationship between the Academy Awards and the film industry; while awards are seemingly bestowed for reasons of artistic excellence, the Oscars are not, nor have they ever been, separate from industry considerations. As far as artistic judgment is concerned, the Academy occupies a position of privilege as it carries out its function as cultural monitor: “[t]hrough the Oscar Award, the Academy members function as peers, critics, and tastemakers” (Levy 47). That the predominant Academy taste should be middle-brow not only raises issues of credibility with critics, but it also implies connections to the ways in which America would like to see itself in class terms. Taste arises in discussions of the Academy Awards presentation as “an international media event” (xiii) as well: Oscar telecasts have been routinely panned by critics the next morning, but continue to figure as an early-spring viewing ritual. The ceremony operates as a spectacle that celebrates the spectacle of the nominated films. Oscar night is the night that Hollywood performs itself, projecting an image of glamour and inclusiveness.

The Oscar show enjoys an annual global audience of one billion people, thereby constructing “the world as one supranational community” (Levy xiii). The cultural

constructions in which the Academy Awards participate are multiple: the Oscars shape perceptions of the American film industry (often limited to Hollywood products); they construct other nation's cinemas through inclusion or exclusion from the world's "most visible prize" (xiii); and they contribute to constructions of America and its place in the global community. If the Academy Awards constitute "one of the few symbols that still epitomize 'the American Dream'" (xiv), and "are watched on television by people who are neither American nor moviegoers" (xiii), then the Oscar functions to promote not just film, but specifically American film and the American nation itself. The Academy Awards also shift according to their social context as the Oscar ceremony "epitomizes . . . where show biz happens to be at that particular moment" (Canby, "Why" II 1). While political issues and protests over the years have intruded upon the Academy's desired unified constructions of Hollywood, these protests have themselves become part of the Oscars' signification. As the Academy Awards for 1998 demonstrated, unity can be difficult to maintain in the face of competing voices.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded March 19, 1927 "as a nonprofit association" (Levy 1). Described as "the League of Nations of the Motion Picture Industry" by Mary Pickford, the Academy was intended as an "all-encompassing organization" that would function as "a focal point for unbiased judgments, coordination and cool thinking in the often-scrambled movie community known as Hollywood" (Osborne 7). Important elements of the AMPAS mandate were as follows:

The Academy will take aggressive action in meeting outside attacks that are unjust.

It will promote harmony and solidarity among the membership and among the different branches.

It will adopt such ways and means as are proper to further the welfare and protect the honor and good repute of the profession.

It will encourage the improvement and advancement of the arts and sciences of the profession by the interchange of constructive ideas and by awards of merit for distinctive achievements.

It will take steps to develop greater power and influence of the screen.

In a word, the Academy proposes to do for the motion picture profession in all its branches what other great national and international bodies have done for other arts and sciences industries. (Levy 1)

From its inception, then, the Academy was concerned with the promotion of the film industry, taking responsibility for defending it from criticism, and expanding the industry's power. Attacks had come from "[c]hurch groups [who] charged that the medium foisted harmful influences on unsuspecting patrons, and Parent-Teacher Associations [who] criticized Hollywood's preoccupation with adult themes," as well as from the government, who "often cast a critical eye on Hollywood, eager to show the moviemakers how to use, or how not to use, their undeniable influence over the masses" (Osborne 7).

The formation of the Academy was not merely an attempt to increase the influence of the film industry, but also to increase the Academy's own sway over the industry. Robert Osborne, author of *65 Years of the Oscar: the Official History of the Academy Awards*, avoids invoking any ulterior motives on the part of the AMPAS founders, claiming that the Academy was founded to "benefit the entire industry, help solve

technological problems, aid in arbitrating labor disputes, and assist Will Hays in policing screen content” (9). Not all descriptions of the Academy’s inception are as uncritical. Emanuel Levy acknowledges that “[a] prime motive for the foundation of the Academy was the 1926 unionization of the motion picture industry” since the union agreement did not apply to “the creative groups—directors, writers, and actors” (2). As Anthony Holden writes, the Academy, largely the “brainchild” of Louis B. Mayer, began as “a thinly disguised studio pressure group designed to keep further unionization at bay” (89). Osborne explains that “[t]he Academy was intended as an exclusive, invitational organization” (9), and while “the Academy’s small size has contributed to its prestige” (Levy 5), such exclusivity functioned in the early years to keep the Academy’s power in the hands of a few.

Such power did not go uncontested by members of the film industry. Although “[t]he Academy managed, as film historians have observed, ‘to forestall serious labor organizing among the Hollywood artists for over five years’” (Levy 2), talent groups eventually broke away to form their own unions. As Osborne diplomatically puts it, “the Academy often became involved in studio problems and union matters, but such endeavors were never its strongest suit” (13). Both the Screen Writers Guild and Screen Actors Guild were established in 1933, and they denounced the Academy “as a company union” (Holden 115) in their jointly published, *The Screen Guilds Magazine*. The founding of SAG was prompted by reactions to the new regulatory code of the Motion Picture Committee (of which then-Academy president, J. Theodore Reed, was a member):

The producer-created code put a ceiling on the salaries of writer, actors and directors (but not on those of studio executives); demanded that talent agents

had to be licensed by the same producers they would be doing business with; and declared that artists could not accept bids from other studios when their contracts were up for renewal until the original studio had definitely decided not to re-hire them. (Wiley and Bona 47)

The Directors Guild was formed in January 1936, and complained that “No one can respect an organization with the high-sounding title of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences which has failed in every single function it has assumed” (qtd. in Holden 127). The guilds boycotted the Academy Awards that year—unsuccessfully, according to then-Academy president Frank Capra, but successfully according to the guilds themselves (Holden 130). Osborne notes that “[b]y the time the first decade of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was over, it was completely out of the arbitration business” (13).

The Academy aroused suspicion not only in terms of its involvement in labour issues, but also in its granting of annual awards. As Levy notes, “the bestowal of merit awards was only one, not the most important, goal of the Academy when it was established” (1). But whatever Louis Mayer intended when he suggested the formation of AMPAS to further the interests of his own studio, the Academy Awards rapidly became an important fixture in the Hollywood film industry. And just as the Academy’s handling of labour issues was viewed as suspect by members of the industry, so were the voting methods for determining award recipients. For the first year of the Academy Awards, while nominations were made by the larger Academy membership, the winners were chosen by “a Central Board of Judges—made up of *one* member from each branch” (Osborne 15) of the Academy. Thus, the final decision-making process was extremely exclusive, even more so than the Academy itself. By the third Academy Awards, “both the

nomination procedure and the final voting was done by the full membership” (16). A change in this procedure was effected in 1936, when “the nominations were made by a special Awards Nominating Committee, appointed by President Frank Capra, with the final vote then done by the full Academy membership” (16). The Academy’s tension between elitism (exclusive membership) and democracy (voting on the Academy Awards) elucidates the power struggles within AMPAS and the larger film industry. Because the Academy’s membership included powerful studio moguls, there were frequent accusations of block-voting for studio products. Osborne defuses such accusations by declaring that “[n]o one was more disapproving of industry pressures—if they really did exist [—]. . . than the Academy itself” (150). But to displace the Academy from the industry is disingenuous. Further, such a belief is tremendously naïve in view of the power and authority associated with the Academy Awards. The studio moguls “held such sway over the voting process” (Holden 183), instructing their employees in their voting choices, that Academy Award selections were anything but unbiased.

Accusations of “politics and log-rolling” (Churchill, “Reforms” X 5) certainly undermined the Academy’s credibility where lack of bias is concerned. The Academy apparently became more democratic when, “[f]or the first time[,] the voting was open to the rank and file of the industry; 10,000 participated” (Churchill, “Convenes” X 5). This gesture on the part of the Academy was an effort to resolve its “membership crisis” (Holden 219) by including the guilds that had been a thorn in the Academy’s side. The inclusion of “the rank and file of the industry” in the Oscar voting process apparently introduced another compromise of the Academy’s credibility by throwing taste into question. Since any member of the Screen Actors Guild was now eligible to vote, puzzling

and seemingly unworthy Oscar victories were blamed on “the extras.” Regarding the Academy Awards for 1942, for example, “[t]he *New York World-Telegram* felt that the 4,500 extras who got to vote on Best Picture, Best Song and the Acting Awards held an imbalance of power. The paper scoffed, ‘That means the actors’ taste prevails. *Mrs. Miniver* had the showy quality and nobility dear to any actor’s heart’” (Wiley and Bona 131). The previous year, the extras were blamed by *Daily Variety* “for electing the popular ballad” (121), “The Last Time I Saw Paris,” as Best Song. It seems that the Academy had become *too* democratic for some, as though the extras constituted tasteless groundling figures who tainted the lofty Academy aspirations. This alleged imbalance of power in the extras’ favour undermined the Academy’s exclusivity, and appeared to justify the equation between exclusive membership and credibility; the extras, in effect, became the Academy scapegoats. Beginning with the Academy Awards for 1946, their inclusion in the voting process was limited to participation in nominations (Wiley and Bona 164); this inclusion came to an end altogether in 1957, when the Academy “dismissed all the Hollywood guilds from the voting process, returning it to Academy members only” (Holden 219).

Taste is a crucial issue for the Academy and the maintenance of its credibility. The Academy Awards constitute “the most popular and the most prestigious award in the film world” (Levy 31); their visibility alone makes the Academy effective as a cultural monitor, and allows its judgments to stand as declarations of taste. Invoking Kant, Pierre Bourdieu defines taste as “an acquired disposition to ‘differentiate’ and ‘appreciate’” (466), but the Academy’s capacity to differentiate and appreciate has not gone unchallenged. As Levy explains, “The National Society of Film Critics was founded in 1968 as a ‘high-brow’ association, to counter the ‘middle-brow’ circles whose tastes were considered to be too

similar to the Academy's" (37). Significantly, the National Society of Film Critics was founded more than a decade after the screen guilds were excluded from the Academy Awards voting process; thus, the Academy has not always been able to deflect criticism onto the extras.

The position of the Academy "as a standard setter" (Levy 21) that depends on middle-brow taste must be examined. According to Bourdieu, middle-brow culture is primarily consumed by the middle classes; it offers them a middle ground between accessibility and the avant-garde, as it comprises

accessible versions of avant-garde experiments or accessible works which pass for avant-garde experiments, film "adaptations" of classic drama and literature, "popular arrangements" of classical music or "orchestral versions" of popular tunes, vocal interpretations of classics in a style evocative of scout choruses or angelic choirs, in short, everything that goes to make up "quality" weeklies and "quality" shows, which are entirely organized to give the impression of bringing legitimate culture within the reach of all, by combining two normally exclusive characteristics, immediate accessibility and the outward signs of cultural legitimacy. (323)

As previously stated, one of the Academy's mandates at its inception was to elevate the status of cinema; the Academy functions as a middle-brow monitor by upholding film as art—particularly the films honoured by the Academy—while bestowing awards primarily on Hollywood productions easily accessed by the public. But not everyone agreed that the Academy has been a culturally responsible monitor. Douglas W. Churchill alluded to these complaints in 1939, noting that "[s]ome people may be inclined to regard the motion-

picture industry with disappointment because it has not taken itself more seriously as an art"; Churchill himself implies that "some people" may be right, as he follows this statement with references to films as the "product" that Hollywood studios "manufacture" ("Convenes" X 5). And since it is largely Hollywood "products," and often "box-office hits" (Holden 27), that reap the benefits of the Academy Awards, it would follow that considerations of "art" fall by the wayside.

Clearly, there is more to the Oscars than artistic judgment. As Holden writes, "[e]ven in Hollywood, nobody pretends that the Oscars are entirely about artistic merit": "A long list of apparent irrelevancies such as age, public image, previous track record, popularity within the industry and above all box-office bankability count for as much as the actual product or performance among many Oscar voters" (33). A great deal of commercial value rests on winning an Academy Award, as is made evident by the vigorous campaigning of many Oscar hopefuls. The tensions between art and commerce, credibility and bankability, frustrate the aesthetic impartiality to which the Academy claims to aspire. Campaigning for an Academy Award is an Oscar tradition itself, beginning with Mary Pickford in the Academy Award's second year, when she invited "all five members of the Central Board of Judges to tea at Pickfair, the home she shared with [Douglas] Fairbanks, the Academy's founder-president" (Holden 99). Studio campaigning began in 1936, when MGM took out advertisements "in the trade journals for Academy consideration" for the studio's "adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness*" (Wiley and Bona 61). By 1939, the Academy was issuing "a dictum pleading for 'no electioneering or lobbying, as there has been in the past'" (Holden 143-44). But campaigning continued, and in 1945, "Joan Crawford made an innovation that would permanently alter the character of the Academy

Awards, by hiring her own personal press agent to press her claim for glory” (172).

Osborne claims that the Academy has denounced campaigning “almost annually” since the 1960s, “but with only limited success at correcting the problem. The soliciting of votes proves to still be a habitual embarrassment” (150). The most embarrassing implication of such campaigning, however, is the notion that it might actually make a difference in the outcome of Oscar votes. *Shakespeare in Love*’s Best Picture win for 1998 elicited cries of protest from the rival producers of *Saving Private Ryan*, who claimed that “excessive spending on Oscar campaigns” (Dafoe C3) by Miramax, producer of *Shakespeare in Love*, created an unfair field of competition.¹ If such campaigns were regarded as ineffective, they might simply be abhorred for their bad taste, rather than for compromising the Oscar-voting results. Important to note is that the Academy Awards are not just tied up in commerce at the campaigning end of the process, but also figure in financial considerations at the winner’s end:

Behind the smokescreen of glamour, schmaltz and supposed artistic achievement, Hollywood’s Academy Awards are, of course, all about money. For performers, an Academy Award adds instant digits to the already huge fees they command, as well as conferring a distinct hint of immortality. For producers and distributors, a mere nomination is enough to wreath a film and its makers in dollar signs. A win can double even a hit movie’s box office. (Holden 31)

Thus, the Academy Award is not just an end in itself, and certainly not simply a stamp of artistic merit from an exclusive club; rather, it forms an integral part of the truly commercial side of the film industry.

The annual telecast of the Academy Awards is also inextricably linked to business considerations. Prior to the awards for 1952, the Academy had been approached with offers to televise the awards ceremony. Such offers were rejected: regarding the awards for 1948, Academy president Jean Hersholt “said no on principle” to “the offer from local TV stations to televise the show” (Wiley and Bona 186); at this point, television was regarded by the film industry as a threat to its own prosperity, so only radio broadcasts of the ceremonies were welcome. Years later, the Academy “voted down a move to broadcast the Awards [for 1951] on television” at the behest of “the theater owners, who, theoretically, had the most to lose the night of the ceremonies” (215). But these business-related concerns that prompted the Academy *not* to televise the awards proceedings were ultimately superseded by more pressing financial concerns: the Oscar telecast proved necessary to maintaining the Academy Awards ceremonies at all. The Academy was accustomed to receiving financial subsidy from the film studios. A crisis had emerged in 1948 when “the Big Five—MGM, Warners, Fox, Paramount and RKO” were instructed by “their New York offices to cut expenses. The Academy Awards show was a good place to start. The quintet issued a statement to the Academy saying that they would no longer be subsidizing the ceremonies” (185). The Academy responded by holding the awards ceremony “in the Academy’s 950-seat screening theater” (186) in order to reduce costs. Following the ceremonies, when the withdrawal of financial support became public, the studios were attacked for undermining the awards while remaining their “main financial beneficiaries” (Holden 195). The studios restored their financial subsidy “on a strictly year-by-year basis” (195), but this support was lost for the awards for 1952, when “Universal-International, Columbia, Republic and Warner Brothers made a joint statement

that they were no longer funding the Awards show. It was 1948 all over again” (Wiley and Bona 225). The Academy accepted RCA’s offer “to buy the broadcast rights to the Awards and telecast them on its network” (225) for \$100,000: “After long resisting the advances of its enemy, the movie industry was finally forced to succumb to television’s blandishments” (Holden 198). Thus, the television spectacle that has become the focal point of the Oscars has its roots in the financial interests of the Academy.

Reactions to the first Academy Awards telecast were positive, and the ratings were excellent as the Oscar presentation “had outdrawn every other show in television history” (Wiley and Bona 231-32). But in the years following 1953, commercial aspects of the Oscar show began to grate on the critics’ nerves, since the Academy Awards’ sponsor, Oldsmobile, clouded the Oscar spectacle by promoting its own products. In 1954, Bosley Crowther complained about “the business of telecasting the ceremony of awards as a gagged-up entertainment on which automobiles were advertised” (“Those” II 1). For Crowther, such commercial aspects were distasteful, “undignified and unbefitting a great and independent industry” (II 1). The credibility of the Academy Awards was therefore undermined by the taint of commercialism and the admission that the film industry could not—or was not willing to—support its own celebration. But Crowther betrayed aesthetic prejudice by suggesting “the Academy affair . . . be sponsored as a high-class institutional event” (II 1). In 1955, J.P. Shanley suggested that the Oscars “be sponsored by the movie industry itself. This would be a fine idea so long as it did not involve a series of plugs for forthcoming films” (36). Shanley’s allusion to the film industry promoting itself captures the essence of the Oscar function. Writing three decades after Shanley, Vincent Canby acknowledged that the commercials which make the Academy Awards possible “provide a

proper context for what is, in effect, one long commercial for movies, which they make look good" ("Stories" II 23). To attempt to separate the Academy Awards from commercialism, then, is deceiving, as it implies that the Oscars are exempt from such considerations. The Academy Awards are not just complicit in industry concerns: they are also primarily in the business of plugging the industry itself.

Millions of viewers have watched the Academy Awards since their first telecast, and its fairly consistent air date (varying only from late March to mid-April) has facilitated the equation of "[w]atching the annual ceremonies" with an "obligatory ritual" (Levy xvi). Similarly, Oscar-bashing by the critics the morning following the telecast is a long-standing tradition. Not only has the commercial component of the awards been attacked, but aspects of the spectacle itself have also come under fire. Only one year after declaring the first Oscar telecast a success, Jack Gould complained that the status of film was lowered by its celebration on television: "If the event is to be turned into just another video program, its distinction is largely lost"; and the Oscars' greatest sin, repeated by critics almost every year—before and after the introduction of televised ceremonies—was that "the Academy show at best was only so-so and generally rather dull" ("Television" 38). Gould later condemned the presentation of the awards for 1959 as "a tasteless disaster, a forlorn study of glamour in a state of disarray" ("TV" 75). Granted, that particular year held the dubious distinction of finishing twenty minutes early, as opposed to the usual situation of running overtime. But ceremonies that have unfolded like clock-work have not necessarily garnered stellar reviews: Janet Maslin disliked the "trimmed-down version" ("Streamlined" C25) of Oscar at the awards for 1984. Presumably, the Oscar spectacle should be entertaining (and presumably, that is why it attracts an audience); however, if

“the shapelessly inflated spectacle” is comprised of “spun-out ‘entertainment’ portions of the show” (Canby, “Yawn” 35), how effective are the Academy Awards as entertainment? Some years are better received than others: in 1986, John J. O’Connor praised the Oscar show for its “[s]piffy electronic techniques and pure celebration” combined with “generous dollops of good-natured and sometimes outrageous humor” (C22). But the Academy Awards also appear to have come to a point in their history where the “awfulness” of the majority of their ceremonies has become yet another dubious Oscar tradition, one which affords a guilty pleasure to the viewer while inverting criteria of taste. Maslin described the Academy Awards for 1979 as a “terribly tasteful” affair, acknowledging that “good taste is not necessarily the stuff on which Oscar thrives” (“Glitter” 21). In 1991, she claimed that it is “the tasteless touches that usually make the Oscar show more fun” (“After” C20). Apparently, without “the shtick, the schlock and the sheer horror that have marked so many of Oscar’s greatest moments” (“Taste” A28), the Academy Awards may avoid conventional accusations of tastelessness, but, in a curious reversal of standards, they betray their own tradition of garish spectacle.

Granted, the Academy does not set out to put on a display devoid of taste; to do so would be to undermine its position as cultural monitor. But the Academy’s self-presentation, and its presentation of the industry, is a calculated one, one that focuses on the centrality of glamour. Because the Oscars promote the Hollywood film industry, and the Academy as the cream of the Hollywood crop, glamour becomes a necessary tool. Glamour is not generated organically, and the Oscars have not become “the most glamorous event in the world” by accident. Throughout its history, the Academy has been responsible for upholding glamour for the American public. As the film “industry’s

principal stock-in-trade" (Churchill, "Convenes" X 5), glamour became a contentious issue during times of crisis. The bombing of Pearl Harbor meant that "[t]he Academy's grandiose plans for the 1941 banquet were cut short," since "[n]ightly blackouts prohibited the usual glitter and pomp" (Wiley and Bona 115). Efforts to scale down the Oscars elicited some negative response. *The Hollywood Reporter* complained that the Academy "ma[de] a pretty hefty thrust at national morale" (qtd. 115), but concerns for morale were not limited to America: "The criticism came from as far away as Britain and Australia, where the press insisted that the excitement and the glamour of the ceremony would take their people's minds off of the fighting" (115). Of course, glamour presupposes wealth, and a display of the former implies the presence of the latter; in other words, for the American film industry to put on its glamorous spectacle would be to assure the public—both national and international—that war-time economic conditions were not as dire as they seemed. Through the Oscars, glamour might be performed for the benefit of the public, but the public does not participate except as audience: one assumption about glamour is that it belongs to the Academy and to the industry. The awards for 1946, for example, were held in the Shrine Auditorium: "The place had 6,700 seats, and to fill them, the Academy sold ticket to the general public" (164). This lack of distinction between industry and public apparently compromised the awards spectacle, for "[a]lthough the Academy had expressly requested black tie, less than half of those attended came formally dressed. Sneered a Hollywood veteran, 'That's what happens when you let in John Q. Public'" (166). Democracy, it seems, is incompatible with glamour, and while the public is assumed to appreciate Hollywood spectacle, it must do so only from a distance.

Not surprisingly, fashion takes centre-stage in Hollywood and Academy Awards glamour. Over the course of Oscar history, individual actresses have been targeted for their failure to live up to the expectations of their star status: Bette Davis, who won the Best Actress Award for 1935, was criticized for her “plain day dress” (Holden 130); and in 1958, Joan Crawford declared that Best Actress winner “Joanne Woodward is setting the cause of Hollywood glamour back twenty years” (qtd. in Wiley and Bona 291) for wearing a dress she had made herself. Fashion has featured prominently “in the Oscar cavalcade from the very earliest days when Mary Pickford ordered her Oscar gown from Paris the same week she started work on *Coquette*” (Brown and Pinkston 105), the role for which she won an Academy Award. But as Peter H. Brown and Jim Pinkston explain, “[i]t was television . . . which sealed fashion’s overriding importance to the Oscar ceremony”:

“From the first televised show in 1953 to the present, appearance has ruled. And for the first sixteen televised years, designer Edith Head ran the whole fashion show and had the right of approval over gowns worn by presenters and winners” (106). To put one individual in a position of authority over Oscar fashion is to unify the construction of Hollywood glamour. In fact, directions were often given to actresses in order to prevent aberrations in Hollywood style: in 1958, the Oscar show producer, Jerry Wald, “declared a ban on the latest fashion rage from Paris—sack dresses” (Wiley and Bona 286). Shifts in styles of clothing have proven to threaten Hollywood glamour at various instances, prompting the Academy to send out dress codes: Julie Christie had to sneak by Edith Head in 1967 in order to hide her mini-skirt; the following year, actresses were once again instructed to “dress in long gowns”; and in response to fashions of the time, “[m]en were reminded that this was a white-tie affair and that turtleneck sweaters, beads, beards, and

unkempt hair was frowned upon” (Wiley and Bona 407). That members of the Hollywood industry have had to be told to forgo comfort and style for “glamour with a capital G” (qtd. 560) indicates the extent to which Hollywood glamour is constructed by the Academy Awards presentation, and implies a kind of overcompensation for the loss of glamour more readily associated with Hollywood in earlier decades. Indeed, the emphasis on glamour appears to be out of step with current realities: in this regard, the Academy Awards serve as “a link to the past and a reminder of the now faded celluloid-and-silver nitrate glamour of another era” (Lindsey C12).

In fact, nostalgia has played a visible role at the Academy Awards, as it “has seemed to be the key theme of recent Oscar shows. . . . The show’s homage to Hollywood’s glorious past came as a response to the criticism that it had become too much of a television event” (Levy 27). Once again, television appears to threaten the status of the Academy Award spectacle, infecting the celebration with its own stars and aesthetic: “indeed, in recent years, many of the awards presenters have been young performers who have nothing to do with movies, but whose popularity among television viewers was the only reason for their being on the Oscar platform” (27). Nostalgia at the Academy Awards often takes the form of celebrating Academy Awards history, particularly in years deemed a significant Oscar “anniversary.” At the Academy Awards for 1947, the twentieth anniversary of the Oscars, “the theme of the evening was ‘Oscar’s Family Album’” (Wiley and Bona 177); this theme was repeated fifty years later to celebrate the Academy Awards’ seventieth anniversary. The awards for 1967—the fortieth anniversary—featured stars in film clips discussing highlights of each decade of the Academy Awards. These Oscar

retrospectives add another layer to the Academy Awards celebration: the Oscars not only promote films and the Hollywood industry, but also themselves as a cultural phenomenon.

The Academy Awards do not exist in a vacuum; neither does the industry they promote. And Hollywood glamour is not the only construction effected by the Academy Awards spectacle. America is also shaped for millions of viewers, as it is reflected in celebrated films and performances as well as in the ceremonies themselves. Levy claims that “[t]he Oscar has always been regarded as more than a local or American prize,” and that “the Oscar disregards the nationality of film artists, who can compete in any of the categories” (73). But Holden lets the numbers speak for themselves: “In sixty-two years of the Oscars, 75 percent of the awards had gone to Americans. The British may have been next in line, but only thirteen had previously won Best Actor—and only five of those in films . . . [were] financed and made in the British Isles” (29). Further, as Levy tentatively puts it, the British success at the Oscars is “perhaps” related to “the fact that they have appeared in *English-speaking* movies” (74). Nation is not supposed to be a criterion for an Oscar nomination or win: “The Academy rules stated from the very beginning: ‘No national or Academy membership distinctions are to be considered’” (Levy 73). But this rule appears to have been disregarded over the course of Academy history. Nominated for the Best Picture of 1946, Laurence Olivier’s *Henry V* was given a Special Award,

quite clearly designed to keep the real Oscars in American hands. Mayer and the other moguls who had seen the phenomenal growth of their accidental brainchild over twenty years, and who now held such sway over the voting process, were quite open in their belief that the awards’ prime function was to promote and publicize American products. (Holden 183)

When Olivier's *Hamlet* won Best Picture for 1948, "[m]ost of Hollywood was not in a celebratory mood. The *Hollywood Reporter* wrote: '*Hamlet's* ghost stalked Hollywood last night and in the most ghoulish seventy-five minutes the picture business ever experienced waltzed off with a flock of golden Oscars'" (Wiley and Bona 190). Indeed, nation was sometimes used by members of the Hollywood industry as a campaigning tool. In 1961, Murray Schumach criticized Oscar hopefuls who indicated "that [Academy] members should not vote for foreigners" and "[l]eading Hollywood columnists [who] repeatedly suggested that Hollywood might be put to shame if the acting awards were swept by foreigners"; for example, "attacks were particularly strong against the Greek actress Melina Mercouri, who had been nominated for her performance in '*Never on Sunday*'" ("Chart" II 11). A year later, Schumach viewed Sophia Loren's Best Actress win for *Two Women* as "a precedent" set by the Academy, for Loren "thus became the first foreigner to win an Oscar in a major category for work in a foreign language film" ("Sweep" II 9). Schumach proved too optimistic, since it took another thirty-seven years for another non-American to win in a foreign-language film role: Roberto Benigni was named Best Actor of 1998 for *Life is Beautiful*.

Because there are no separate categories for performers according to nation, and because the Academy Awards claim to disregard nationality in nominating and awarding prizes to performances, then the fact that Americans have won the majority of Oscars implies that American performers are consistently superior to the rest of the world. Levy writes that there is "one exception" in terms of separate categories: "the Best Picture Oscar differentiates between English-speaking and foreign-language movies" (73). In 1939, the French film, *La Grande illusion*, was the first foreign-language film to be nominated for

Best Picture. In 1947, a special award was given to the Italian film, *Shoe-shine*, but “not until the 1956 awards year were foreign language films saluted in a category of their own, with nominations” (Osborne 94). Levy’s division of the Best Picture category into English-speaking and foreign-language films is somewhat inaccurate. To begin with, Levy implies that the two awards are somehow equal in stature; however, it is customary for the foreign-language award to be presented mid-way through the Oscar ceremony, while for several decades now, the Best Picture award has been the last prize to be announced. Moreover, if the distinction between the two awards were really a minor one, the “English-language” Best Picture award would be named as such. The Best Foreign Film category contains the threat of foreignness; however, films nominated for the foreign-language prize are still eligible for Best Picture. Indeed, a handful of films over the course of Oscar history have been nominated in both categories; none of them has ever won both. The fact that foreign-language films are eligible for the Academy’s supreme prize once again suggests that English-language films (almost always American) are superior to all of their foreign-language counterparts. Thus, the Academy consistently manages to assert American cinematic supremacy, only very occasionally slipping to uphold a British film as the year’s best.

America has been invoked in various ways at the Academy Awards over the course of Oscar history. In Oscar’s early decades, especially, American politics were visible at the Academy Awards celebrations. In 1932, Vice-President Charles Curtis was present at the Academy Awards “to deliver a special tribute to the film industry, praising it for boosting national morale during the Depression” (Holden 48). Hollywood’s ability to help keep America happy was also applauded at the Oscars for 1940, where “[t]he ceremony began

... with a radio address from President Roosevelt”; Roosevelt had declined the invitation to attend the Academy Awards, “the international situation being what it was,” and instead used his speech to “lau[d] Hollywood for its defense fund-raising efforts, pus[h] his Lend-Lease bill and prais[e] filmmakers for promoting ‘the American way of life’” (Wiley and Bona 108). Roosevelt thus made explicit the Hollywood film industry’s function of advertising America and its values; to include this speech as part of the Oscar proceedings is also to implicate the Academy Awards in a hegemonic project. The ceremony the following year included Roosevelt’s unsuccessful Republican opponent from the 1940 presidential election, Wendell Willkie, as “featured speaker of the ‘dinner’” (118). In response to the war effort, the Oscars’ spectacle was less a display of glamour and more a demonstration of American patriotism: “there were no floral decorations. American flags dominated the entrance and the ballroom was bedecked with flags of the Allies. A gold American eagle kept watch over the podium” (118). As an important American cultural institution, then, the Hollywood film industry, via the Academy Awards, presented its interests as synonymous with the American war effort. And to express this intersection of interests in the context of celebration was doubly to promote American culture.

If Academy interests converge with those of America as a whole, and if the Academy Awards celebrate the “best” of American cinematic products, then how is America itself constructed? Given the dominance of English-speaking films, a language bias is clearly evident, eclipsing other linguistic groups of the American population. The overwhelmingly white roster of Oscar winners has also been criticized frequently over the last several decades. At the awards for 1976, Richard Pryor announced, “I’m here to explain why black people will never be nominated for anything” (qtd. in Wiley and Bona

522). Only a handful of black performers have won Academy Awards, beginning with Hattie McDaniel, who won Best Supporting Actress for her role in *Gone With the Wind*: McDaniel “was not merely the first black person to win an Oscar, but the first to attend an Academy banquet as a guest rather than a waitress” (Holden 145). Sidney Poitier’s Best Actor win for 1964 was viewed by some as “strong evidence of a warm and liberal feeling” (Crowther, “Vote” II 1) and a statement against “parochialism [and] prejudice” (Schumach, “Cheer” II 7). But this “liberal” feeling has not led to much overall change in the racial distribution of Academy Awards. In the years since Poitier’s win, a few African-American actors have won awards in the supporting categories, but none in the lead actor or actress categories. Other races have been all but absent from the Academy Award winners: for example, Haing Ngor, named 1984’s Best Supporting Actor for *The Killing Fields*, is the only Asian to have won an Oscar; no Native American has ever won. Thus, the Oscars’ construction of what is “best” in America has been extremely narrow in its racial scope.

The presence of the Best Supporting Actress and Best Actress categories ensures that women are visible at the Academy Awards; however, this presence does not translate into unproblematic representations of gender on the part of the Oscars. Oscar-winning roles for women tend to be quite limited: “The two most distinctive attributes of the female Oscar roles have been sex and suffering” (Levy 194). Limitation arises in other categories as well: no woman had won “a solo Oscar for Original Screenplay” (Holden 477) until Callie Khouri won in 1992 for *Thelma and Louise*; and only two women—Lina Wertmüller for 1976 and Jane Campion for 1993—have ever been nominated as Best Director. At the level of Oscar spectacle, it seems that women are more necessary for their fashion sense than for their talent or credibility. In 1979, Farrah Fawcett “almost stayed home [Oscar]

night after the *L.A. Times* questioned her appropriateness as a presenter. ‘We need you, we need your glamor [*sic*],’ producer Howard W. Koch pleaded” (Brown and Pinkston 118). Prominent actors or male directors are also more likely to be chosen than actresses or female directors for “the prestigious job of presenting the best picture award” (Maslin, “Energy” C18).

For its ceremonies for 1992, the Academy chose the theme, “Oscar Celebrates Women and the Movies,” ironic “for a year in which there were notoriously few good roles for women” (James II 15). The Academy’s choice of a specific year to celebrate women implies that it does not celebrate women in any other year. This theme also sparked some debate about the gender politics of the Oscars. When asked about the implications of having separate actor and actress categories, Alfre Woodard responded that “[a] separate category is another way of making us a special-interest group”; Bette Midler, however, recognized the sad reality of a combined category when she replied, “I’m all for separate categories or no woman would *ever* win an Oscar” (qtd. in James II 15, II 23). The actual ceremony presentation for Oscar’s Year of the Woman was itself problematic:

[T]his year’s show missed no opportunity to emphasize Hollywood’s feminine side, no matter how misconceived that opportunity might be.

There was, for instance, a quickie tribute to “93 winners or nominees written or cowritten by women.” But as luminaries were seen entering the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, the background music was “Thank Heaven for Little Girls.” . . . The show was determined to honor women as sanctimoniously as possible, provided it could retain the usual quota of dancing girls. (Maslin, “Attention” C15).

Hence, even the Academy Award's celebration of women reinforced patronizing attitudes and the function of women as display, making no effort to challenge patriarchal assumptions. If the Academy Award is "a symbol that . . . capture[s] the essence of American popular culture" (Levy xi), the outlook for women involved in producing American popular culture, and for women in general, does not look as healthy as it could be.

Granted, the Academy Awards, to a large degree, operate as a reflection of the Hollywood film industry that they celebrate; systemic problems within the Academy Awards are shared by that industry. The Oscars have become a target of sorts for political protests: often avoided by television cameras so as to hide controversy from the viewing public, protestors of various issues to do with the film industry have flocked to the site of the Academy Awards to make their point. The awards for 1961 marked "the first time . . . pickets used the media spotlight on the Oscars to trumpet their causes. A group calling itself the Hollywood Race Relations Bureau marched outside the Auditorium with placards reading 'Film Equality for Negroes' and 'All Negroes Want a Break'" (Wiley and Bona 337). The representation of Latinos as "inferior, incompetent, worthless and ignorant" (437) in films was protested at the awards for 1969. Gender has been an issue, particularly in 1984 when Barbra Streisand was passed over for a Best Director nomination for *Yentl*: "Posters of Barbra Streisand greeted the Academy's guests as thirty demonstrators waved placards that read: IF YENTL WAS ANSEL, SHE'D BE NOMINATED and SCORE—1927-PRESENT, BEST DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS: MEN—273; WOMEN—1" (638). And in 1992, Queer Nation protested to raise awareness of homosexuality as it criticized "what it sees as the pervasive anti-homosexual feeling among film makers" (Campbell A1).

While such critiques target larger issues within the film industry, individual members of the industry have also drawn the attention of protestors. At the awards for 1977, Best Supporting Actress nominee Vanessa Redgrave was the focus of both protestors and supporters because of her professed views of the Palestinian situation: "About seventy-five members of the Jewish Defense League shouted and waved anti-Redgrave signs while nearby some two hundred PLO members and sympathizers demonstrated in support of the nominee" (Wiley and Bona 547). Of course, neither group was "seen by television viewers" (Levy 323).

Although television cameras might avoid including such protests as part of the Oscar spectacle, politics have often entered the ceremonies themselves, much to the chagrin of the Academy. That award recipients have often disturbed the seemingly apolitical presentation indicates that Hollywood and the Academy are hegemonic, rather than monolithic; at times there are challenges to the status quo even within the Oscar show itself. When Peter Davis and Bert Schneider won Best Documentary Feature for 1974 for *Hearts and Minds*, their film about the Vietnam War, Schneider included in his speech

a wire from the Vietcong delegation at the peace talks then under way in Paris: "Please transmit to all our friends in America our recognition of all they have done on behalf of peace and for the application of the Paris accords on Vietnam. These actions serve the legitimate interests of the American people and the Vietnamese people. Greetings of friendship to American people." (Holden 300)

Although the wire did not convey a sense of hostility, the Academy certainly reacted in a hostile fashion when Frank Sinatra, won of the evening's co-hosts, "read an impromptu

statement issued on behalf of the Academy”: “We are not responsible for any political references made on the program, and we are sorry they had to take place this evening” (qtd. 300). This incident and the reactions to it reveal many tensions surrounding the Academy’s gesture. The fact that Sinatra “walked offstage to a roasting” (300) from co-host Shirley MacLaine, also an Academy member, underlines the fact that the Academy is not necessarily uniform. Further, Francis Ford Coppola pointed out that the Academy’s statement contradicted its voting of *Hearts and Minds* as Best Documentary: “In voting for that picture the Academy was sanctioning its message, which was in the spirit of Mr. Schneider’s remarks” (qtd. 301). It seems, then, that the “Academy” (in its official capacity) could only tolerate the display of such a film winning an award, and not the display of politics as part of the winners’ speech.

Vanessa Redgrave also sparked a great deal of controversy after winning her Best Supporting Actress award for *Julia*. Her speech included remarks about fighting fascism and anti-Semitism, but it was her reference to “Zionist hoodlums” (qtd. in Holden 71) that elicited boos from the audience. Redgrave received her censure from Paddy Chayefsky, who later on in the Oscar show declared himself “sick and tired of people exploiting the occasion of the Academy Awards for the propagation of their own personal propaganda”; Chayefsky went on to advise Redgrave that “her winning an Academy Award is not a pivotal moment in history, does not require a proclamation, and a simple ‘Thank you’ would have sufficed” (qtd. in Holden 71). Chayefsky therefore suggested that the Academy Awards are not a venue for political protests; and yet, Oscar history has shown that such a theory has not translated into practice. Political protest is indeed a part of the Academy Awards, regardless of whether it is sanctioned by the Academy itself. Chayefsky

implied that his position was one of neutrality, and Redgrave's one of aggressive ideology. This irony did not go entirely unnoticed: "Anyone who castigates another person for exercising her right to free speech is making a political statement. Maybe you agree with him. But get it straight. He was pontificating. He was didactic. He was politicking" (qtd. in Wiley and Bona 551). What do such protests and statements suggest about the Academy Awards? Certainly, the exposure granted by the occasion affords protestors with a significant audience. To a certain extent, these protests are subsumed into the hegemonic position of the Academy, contained by the larger values of Hollywood and America. But such challenges also expose the cracks in the Academy's armour (as well as Hollywood's and America's armour), and ensure that there is not only one voice to be heard at the Oscars.

Recent Oscar history has revealed power struggles of various sorts, proving that while the Academy Awards have strong traditions that continue throughout their history, there is an extent to which the Oscars are dynamic. The awards for 1996 constituted a slap in the face to Hollywood studio products, as all but one of the Best Picture nominees were considered "independent" films: of *The English Patient*, *Secrets and Lies*, *Fargo*, *Shine*, and *Jerry Maguire*, only the last was viewed as a studio product. Granted, many of the independent companies are "actually owned by conglomerates," but the Academy's preference in 1996 for independent features "seemed not only an implicit criticism of studio but also the very system that created them" (Weinraub, "Learns" D3). But only a year later, the "high-tech blockbusters" (D3), to which 1996's successful independent films had been contrasted, made an enormous comeback with *Titanic*'s sweep of the Academy Awards. The centrality of Hollywood was seemingly restored. The Academy Awards for

1998 provided a struggle among many different voices. As a text, this Oscar show is rife with dialogism; there seems to be no unitary Academy vision conveyed either by the Academy Award winners or the Oscar telecast. This particular Oscar celebration complicated established patterns at the Academy Awards. To begin with, Whoopi Goldberg acted as host for her third time. As a black woman more or less placed in the position of speaking for the Academy, Goldberg challenged the Academy's racial and gender norms simply by her presence; because she was responsible for speaking more than anyone else in the show, it was her voice that carried the celebration. But competition of voices was also a part of the show, especially where Elia Kazan's honorary Oscar was concerned. Controversy surrounded the award because Kazan "named names before the House Un-American Activities Committee" (Weinraub, "Protests" E3) in 1952. Presenting the award for sound effects editing, Chris Rock referred to Kazan as "a rat." After Kazan came on stage to accept his award, audience reactions were varied: while many gave Kazan a standing ovation, some audience members, such as Steven Spielberg and Kate Capshaw, clapped while staying seated (sitting on the fence, as it were); others, such as Nick Nolte and Ed Harris, neither stood nor clapped. As these varied responses suggest, the Academy's complicity in the blacklisting, by honouring Kazan's contribution to the film industry, was not accepted unproblematically by everyone in the audience.² Because the television cameras included shots of all these reactions, television viewers were equally aware of the lack of unity in the auditorium; indeed, this lack of unity became part of the Oscar show spectacle.

Clocked in at a record four hours and two minutes (Dafoe C1), the Academy Awards for 1998 seemed to lose its grip in other areas besides running time. This Oscar

show featured a struggle between the assertion of American films and values and the celebration of foreign works. Several montage sequences worked to uphold American primacy in filmmaking: a tribute to the Western credited the genre with “spark[ing] our dreams of America”; and a montage of real-life heroes represented in films concentrated mostly on figures who were male, white, and American. Certain presenters were themselves testaments to American national pride: John Glenn introduced the montage of heroes; and Colin Powell presented the clips for Best Picture nominees, *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*. The presence of Glenn and Powell as presenters was ironic, given criticisms in earlier years of “inappropriate” presenters who were television stars; Glenn and Powell do not work in show business. The introductions of these presenters were full of American rhetoric: Tom Hanks praised John Glenn as “a bona fide national hero”; and MPAA president Jack Valenti hailed Colin Powell for his understanding of “the American spirit, which has defined our nation since its inception, from the birth year of the Republic.” Clips of Best Picture nominees were grouped together according to story concerns; thus, *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love*, as films set in the Elizabethan period, were presented together. *Life is Beautiful* is set at the time of World War II; however, it was not included with the presentation of *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*. It would seem that the nationality of *Life is Beautiful* precluded it from being grouped with the two American war films.

But although Americanness was repeatedly asserted over the course of the Oscar show, it did not eclipse other voices. The Irving G. Thalberg award was given to Norman Jewison, whose work, as presenter Nicolas Cage noted, “has received twelve Oscars and forty-one Academy Award nominations.” But Jewison has never won a competitive

Academy Award himself, in spite of the Oscar success of his films and performers in his films. Holden insists that the fact that Jewison is Canadian has prevented him from receiving an Oscar of his own, due to “the Academy’s apparent meanness to its cousins from across the border” (329); regarding Jewison’s failure to win Best Director for *In the Heat of the Night*, in spite of the film’s win for Best Picture, Holden writes that “it is hard to find anyone to contradict the theory that Jewison missed out in 1967 because he was a Canadian, and Hollywood directors did not want successful foreigners muscling into an already crowded market” (264). Jewison’s Thalberg award may fall into the category of honorary awards “offered simply to make amends” or to “mollify filmmakers of undoubted distinction who simply slipped through the net” (Holden 388, 389). But the award nonetheless constitutes a recognition of a Canadian filmmaker on the part of the Academy. Granted, Jewison’s work fits into the context of Hollywood filmmaking, but if his nationality has previously been an issue for Academy voters, the Thalberg might indeed function as an apology. Jewison highlighted his nationality in his speech, declaring that had there been a financial component of the award, he would share it “with the Canadian Film Centre and the AFI”; in doing so, he made Canadian filmmaking visible alongside American filmmaking for an audience of one billion people.

But in this Oscar show, Americanness found even greater challenges to its dominance than Norman Jewison. Both the Best Actor and Best Actress categories featured nominated performances in foreign-language films: Roberto Benigni for *Life is Beautiful*, and Fernanda Montenegro for *Central Station*. Benigni’s win made him the first Best Actor in a foreign-language film. *Life is Beautiful* won Best Foreign Film, and was also nominated for Best Picture. Benigni and his film were more visible than past foreign

film winners; many of Goldberg's and other presenters' jokes invoked Benigni's trademark exuberance. Benigni himself added tremendously to the Oscar spectacle at the announcement of the Best Foreign Film win, standing on the back of his chair before running to the stage. *Life is Beautiful* also won for Best Musical Score for a comedy, adding to the film's presence at the ceremonies. The film did not win Best Picture (perhaps contained by its win for Best Foreign Film), but neither did the American war films. While *Shakespeare in Love* was an American-produced film, it did not participate in the rhetoric promoted by John Glenn and Colin Powell. With all these competing voices and rhetoric, Goldberg could only simulate a unitary vision at the end of the show by referring to movies as "a language, that is, as we saw tonight, universal." If the Academy's traditional identity is not coming apart at the seams, at least the threads appear to be loosening. Despite efforts to enforce America and its ideals over the course of the programme, non-American influences asserted a presence of their own.

As long as the Academy Awards continue, their significance will be dynamic as they respond to, reflect, and comment upon shifts in the film industry and in society. But Oscar history and tradition have revealed the Academy Awards to be as tied up in commerce as concerned with middle-brow taste, and as much about holding on to fading notions of glamour as about celebrating the present moment of show business. Regardless of the Academy's official disregard for nation when granting awards, the Oscars "reaffirm the central values in American dominant culture" (Levy 334) even as they constitute an internationally viewed spectacle. As Holden acknowledges, "the films and performers honored by the Academy tend to be those reflecting the celluloid American dream invented and nurtured by Hollywood. It is thus only logical, perhaps, that the awards bear much the

same relationship to artistic standards as does that dream to the everyday lives of most Americans” (479). The middle-brow taste of the Academy strengthens and maintains the Oscars’ relationship to middle-class America, adding to the constructions of the nation itself. The Academy Awards are, therefore, coterminous with the American Dream, as the Oscar “has embodied such basic American orientations as democracy, equality, individualism, competitiveness, upward mobility, hard work, occupational achievement, and monetary success” (334). The Oscar has traditionally celebrated the work of white American males, but those winners excluded from some or all of those categories presumably attest to upward mobility and hard work; however, such winners also present a challenge to the dominant order, even if such a challenge might be subsumed into the Academy perspective. The Academy may attempt to project itself as a unified entity, but a unitary vision cannot always be convincing, or even offered in the first place. Shifts in the Oscars over the course of their history indicate that while certain trends are dominant, the Academy is not monolithic: it might cringe at and criticize oppositional voices, but those voices are audible nonetheless.

Notes

1. Harvey Weinstein, co-chairman of Miramax, responded that “DreamWorks actually spent more, pre-Oscars, pushing *Private Ryan* than he did pushing *Shakespeare*” (Dafoe C3).

2. The Academy was also complicit in the blacklisting during the McCarthy era itself. Osborne does his best to gloss over this part of Academy history, so as to make the Academy’s position as inoffensive as possible: “[t]hough the Academy stayed clear of the blacklisting controversy, either directly or implied, it became involved later when certain scripts by writers involved in the so-called Un-American investigations became eligible for Oscar consideration although their authors were denied screen credit” (102). But Osborne goes on to include the introduction of the Academy’s “bylaw” (described by Holden as a “loyalty oath” [211]) on February 6, 1957:

Any person who, before any duly constituted Federal legislative committee or body, shall have admitted that he is a member of the Communist party (and has not since publicly renounced the party), or who shall have refused to respond to a subpoena to appear before such a committee or body, shall not be eligible for an Academy Award so long as he persists in such a refusal. (Osborne 102)

Osborne writes that while the bylaw “was a gesture made in the spirit of the political times,” it “proved to be an embarrassment almost at once” (102). Among the embarrassments related to the Academy’s position was the fact that the Academy was duped more than once into awarding blacklisted writers: Dalton Trumbo won an award under the name of “Robert Rich” in 1957; the same year, the writers of *The Bridge on the*

River Kwai, Carl Foreman and Michael Wilson, gave their screen credit to Pierre Boulle, writer of the work on which the screenplay was based (Wiley and Bona 212, 214). The Academy's bylaw was "revoked by the Academy's Board of Governors" on January 12, 1959 (Osborne 102), but the fact that it was ever in place attests to the Academy's part in constructing what is and what is not acceptable to include under the umbrella of what is "American" and "un-American."

Chapter Two

Salvaged Spectacle: *Titanic* and the Oscars

Prior to and following its release, James Cameron's *Titanic* was surrounded by discussions of excess: *Titanic* was the most expensive film ever made, the highest-grossing film ever released, and it tied for a record number of Academy Awards. Excess also characterizes the production values of the film itself, for the \$200 million (U.S.) was spent on accentuating the film's glamour and spectacle. The last half of Cameron's film portrays the sinking of the ship and the destruction of that glamour; all the film's elements are ultimately subordinate to the film's spectacle. But the film is precluded from being a mere action film through the romance plot that complicates *Titanic*'s insertion into a coherent genre. As "half disaster flick, half period romance" (Johnson 86), *Titanic* has the perfect platform for the staging of glamour and spectacle, displaying both the ship and the film's stars. This combination of two genres translates into a negotiation of gender: the separate parts of *Titanic*'s story conventionally appeal to either men (in the case of the action sequences) or women (in the case of the romance), as the film appears to take on specifically gendered narratives. The narratives of Jack's heroism and Rose's liberation are dependent upon each other, and the film fluctuates in its privileging of each story. It seems that both elements of the narrative are equally responsible for the film's success with the viewing public; but *Titanic* also found overwhelming success at the Academy Awards. While the Oscars negotiate taste, taste itself becomes an issue in *Titanic*, the box-office smash success that dominated the Oscars for 1997: references to visual art attempt to align the film with artistic merit in the film's bid to "represen[t] an artistic achievement for a blockbuster king" (Lacey, "Winners" C9). The success of *Titanic* at the Academy Awards,

where it won eleven prizes, has added to the spectacle of the film itself, extending the significance of the film and its aesthetic. Its multiple Oscar victories also connect to the film's exploration of the American Dream, of which the Academy Awards are a supreme symbol. *Titanic* is significant not only on its own terms, but also in relation to the larger Hollywood film industry and its celebration of itself.

As Justin Wyatt and Katherine Vlesmas note, "James Cameron's *Titanic* entered the public sphere first and foremost through its budget" (29). Much of the media discourse surrounding the making of *Titanic* initially focused on the fact that at \$200 million, the film was the most expensive movie ever made. In order to explain going \$100 million over budget, James Cameron invoked his subject matter as justification: "The scale of this picture was largely determined by the scale of the event it's depicting" (qtd. in Waal 33). Hence, the film, about excess, is itself excessive, mimicking its subject. Indeed, part of *Titanic*'s excess is its bid for authenticity in its rendering of the ship: Cameron "had Twentieth Century Fox build him a forty-acre production site on Rosarito Beach, in Mexico, including a million-gallon seawater tank that would house the scale model of the *Titanic*. The model itself was a 7/8 scale replica of the ship" (32). Excess characterizes not only size, but also attention to detail: Cameron "persuaded the original carpet manufacturer to make an 18,000-square-foot reproduction of its 'Titanic' weave"; further, "[s]ets match old photographs right down to the sculpture and woodwork; costumes incorporate fragments of vintage clothing; even the silver White Star Line ashtrays had to be right" (Maslin, "Spectacle" E1, E18). While much of the film's spectacle involves the destruction of the ship, the details of the *Titanic* itself place the ship, in its intact state, at the centre of the spectacle and the visual pleasure it offers.

Cameron has said that “[s]ome people are mistaking *Titanic*’s success for the return of the spectacle . . . But it’s more than that. This movie messes you up emotionally” (Lacey, “Overboard” C9). While the Jack and Rose’s love story has certainly played a large role in *Titanic*’s popularity—particularly with teenaged girls—the film does insist on spectacle through what it puts on display. Most of the film’s gargantuan budget has been “in the service of one spectacular illusion: that the ship is afloat again, and that the audience is intimately involved in its voyage” (Maslin, “Spectacle” E1). The ship does not simply function as backdrop to the love story; rather, the *Titanic* is featured for its own sake. Several times in the film, prior to the ship’s crash into the iceberg, the *Titanic* appears in “eye-popping” (Stark 1D) long shot, moving across the Atlantic. These shots do not function to advance the narrative, nor to situate the ship in any context: because no land is visible, there is no sense of the ship’s progress; that progress is delivered verbally through the dialogue of crew members. The only information that can be gleaned from these long shots of the *Titanic* is whether it is night or day, and that the ship has yet to sink. Although the distinctions of night and day might function for the viewer as a countdown to the sinking, they also provide the film with an opportunity to show off its most expensive star. Interior shots of the ship also enhance the display: the wooden staircase and the glass dome overhead particularly show off the opulence of the *Titanic*; several shots begin with the glass dome, and tilt down to showcase the grandeur below. This position of the ship and its function in terms of display rather than narrative seem to correspond to Laura Mulvey’s classic analysis of the female figure in narrative film: “The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in

moments of erotic contemplation” (19). Indeed, the link between the ship and the female figure strengthens through the references to the *Titanic* as “she,” a connection that “make[s] the *Titanic* itself like a body” (Lehman and Hunt 102). The ship may not necessarily invite erotic contemplation, but it does invite aesthetic contemplation as the film halts the narrative to show off the *Titanic*’s glamour.

The visual pleasure associated with the ship renders *Titanic*’s class commentary highly problematic. The film delivers a sharp contrast between first-class and steerage conditions on the ship. As Laurie Ouellette argues, however, “Cameron’s claim that *Titanic* stops just ‘short of Marxist dogma’ implies that the film critiques dominant class relations—and invites controversy in the process—but critique is safely focused on the snobbery of a few loathsome first-class characters” (169). Further, the distinction between first and third-class becomes a site of the viewer’s pleasure and desire. Cameron writes that the narrative is “woven . . . from the stern to the bow and through every interesting place and event in between allowing us to experience the optimism and grandeur of the ship in a way that most of her passengers never did” (vi-vii). It is Rose’s class that grants the viewer access to first-class luxury, putting the audience in a position of privilege; Jack’s frequent insertions of himself into that context of luxury allow the film to linger there, rather than dwell on third-class accommodations or the furnace room where labourers are at work. Through “*Titanic*’s re-creation of first-class culture during the Gilded Age” (Ouellette 182), class itself becomes spectacle while it is historically displaced by the film: “by periodizing the Gilded Age, the film invites viewers to observe overt class differences and prejudices—and then dismiss them as anomalies of a bygone era” (175). While “Mark Twain coined the phrase ‘the Gilded Age’ as a critique of the excess he saw around him,”

the fact that “the elaborate first-class interiors of *Titanic* were created at the very peak of this trend toward ostentation” (qtd. in Marsh 37) does not serve as criticism in the film. To a certain extent, “the *Titanic* represents the idealized notion of the American Dream, a dream which motivated mass migration on board the transatlantic ships” (Massey and Hammond 243); the affluence presented by first-class passengers of *Titanic*, “the ship of dreams,” contributes to the film’s “epic embodiment of a quintessential American dream” (Munich and Spiegel 155). The historical displacement of class issues and this particular manifestation of the American Dream imply that there need be no guilt in enjoying the pleasure of the film’s “luxurious expensiveness” (Arroyo 19). But there is a sense in which worth is assessed by the film in terms of potential for spectacle. Although third-class conditions do not afford the opportunity to show off details of first-class luxury, the steerage party to which Jack takes Rose is itself a kind of display through performance: the dancing and music contrast sharply “with [the] rigid images of Cal and the other upper-class men conversing in a drawing room” (Lehman and Hunt 98). First-class wealth can be displayed through stillness; third-class worth is established by its contribution to spectacle through “frivolity” (98) and movement.

While the film shows off the ship, as well as class through performance, *Titanic*’s stars, Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio, are also put on display. The film teases the viewer by first showing representations or brief glimpses of these actors. The nude illustration of young Rose, for example, appears on screen before either old Rose or the young Rose she remembers. When we do finally see Winslet as young Rose, the scene is shot so as to draw attention to the “unveiling” of the character. Young Rose first appears at the *Titanic* dock, getting out of a car, a scene in which Winslet is “given an old-fashioned

movie-star entrance” (Arroyo 18). The camera presents her from a high-angle shot, and reveals first a gloved hand held out for assistance in descending from the vehicle. Once out of the car, Rose is still somewhat hidden by her large hat. As the camera tilts down, Rose lifts up her head, presenting the first live-action view of the younger version of the character. Significantly, during host Billy Crystal’s *Gilligan’s Island* take-off of *Titanic* at the Oscars, this shot of Winslet accompanied the line, “the movie star,” emphasizing the glamour and display of the actress’s entrance into the picture.¹ Again, this introduction focuses on Rose in a kind of pose before her part in the narrative begins. Rose frequently adopts a posed position, sometimes from Jack’s point of view (such as the first time he sees her looking out from the upper deck), other times from simply the camera’s (such as the “flying” scene at the ship’s bow, which combines the ship’s spectacle with that of the film’s stars). The most obvious recurrence of the pose as far as Rose is concerned is during the scene in which Jack draws her nude; the illustration revealed to the viewer at the beginning of the film thus reasserts itself during this scene. Here, too, the “overwhelming” blue diamond, the “Heart of the Ocean,” which Rose wears around her neck, furthers the degree of spectacle. The presence of the illustration in the framing narrative initially inverts usual expectations of spectacle: young Rose’s body is only significant as the background against which the “Heart of the Ocean,” object of Brock Lovett’s search, is displayed. Once old Rose has begun telling her tale, however, and young Rose has been accorded subjectivity, both her body and the diamond become significant, for the purposes of both narrative and display.

But it is not only the female form which figures in *Titanic*’s spectacle: as Liam Lacey argues of Winslet, “she risks being overshadowed by Leonardo DiCaprio’s equally

lovely face” (“Winners” C9). Indeed, Winslet’s presence in the film, and her function as part of the spectacle, has been read by some critics as anomalous in comparison to typical Hollywood practices:

Winslet’s body is overweight in relation to contemporary Hollywood and cultural norms of female beauty. In other words, one of the consequences of not having a conventionally beautiful female lead is the intensification of DiCaprio’s boyish good looks as a replacement for the female star as a traditional source of cinematic pleasure. (Lehman and Hunt 91)

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that DiCaprio’s positioning as “erotic spectacle” (Nash and Lahti 71) goes hand in hand with the negotiation of Jack’s masculinity. In contrast to Cal’s excessively authoritative masculinity, Jack appears feminized; DiCaprio’s youth and somewhat feminine features heighten the contrast between hero and villain as they offer the male figure as an object of display. Again, the film teases the viewer by first revealing Jack through flashes of old Rose’s memory, specifically the brief shots of his eyes as he draws the picture of young Rose. While these shots, in the context of the narrative that is to follow, involve Jack viewing Rose as the object of his “(artistic and romantic) gaze” (72), they also constitute Rose’s returning of the gaze; further, the fact that the viewers are being teased with glimpses of Leonardo DiCaprio emphasize his status as object of display. *Titanic* was released after Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996), the “quintessential teen romance” (68) in which DiCaprio played the quintessential doomed lover; thus, this reputation would have preceded him to the *Titanic* screen, allowing for intertextual reflections on his position in the later film.² The shot of Jack in a tuxedo at the top of the wooden staircase also functions to halt the narrative while drawing attention to

the spectacle of both the ship and the star. Perhaps Jack's status as artist also places him in a somewhat feminized position, at least in contrast to Cal. Whereas Cal pulls out a gun during the ship's sinking in order to kill Jack, Jack is presumably more comfortable with a pencil in his hand. Peter Lehman and Susan Hunt argue that the film criticizes "the notion of the awesome spectacle of phallic male power" (90). They locate Jack's character in the context of the "earth man," a type that conventionally "awakes [the] dormant sexuality" of "a conventionally attractive woman [who] is discontented to the point of psychological instability" (94). Jack fits the "earth man" type insofar as he "lives outside community and family and prefers the company of 'the other' (in Jack's case, European and workingclass people)" (97). He diverges from type, however, in that "[e]arth men are frequently seen disrobed, revealing their toned bodies," while in DiCaprio's case, "only one arm and shoulder are partially visible" during the lovemaking scene; further, DiCaprio "is thinner, less developed, and much more lithe than the earth men of other recent films" (97). But what Lehman and Hunt identify as "the most striking difference between Jack and other body men" is his artist status, a departure from the usual "manual laborers" who fit this character type (97).

Although Jack's artist status may partly feminize him, or at least render a kinder, gentler version of masculinity, this status also legitimizes Jack within the film. Cal is presented as unworthy of Rose for many reasons, one of which is his inability to endorse her artistic taste. Cal refers to the works of modern art she has purchased (one painted by "Something Picasso") as "finger paintings"; Rose retorts, "The difference between Cal's taste in art and mine is that I have some." Because Rose has "purchased work by Picasso, Monet, and Degas" (Lehman and Hunt 97), artists who will become canonized, and are

now recognized for their worth, the film necessarily upholds her taste by pointing out her intuition as far as talent is concerned. Similarly, regardless of the fact that Jack “draws bodies in a highly conventional, realist style—a style against which the philosophical artists rebelled” (97), the film must also endorse Rose’s appreciation of Jack’s work: as a “prodigy of taste” (Turan F14), she is already on the right track with Picasso, Monet, and Degas, which art history will ultimately prove. In fact, in a circulation of taste, the film approves its own maker, for “Jack’s drawing of Rose was actually drawn by Cameron” (Munich and Spiegel 162). Ultimately, the film aligns itself with high art, which begs certain questions of the artistic status of *Titanic*. During his acceptance speech for the Director’s Guild of America award, James Cameron declared, “I used to always say I made movies and not films. *Remains of the Day* is a film. *Terminator 2* is a movie. Now that I have this, I have to admit that I may have inadvertently made a film” (qtd. in Lacey, “Overboard” C1). The distinction between films and movies is, of course, one of high and low brow (or high and middle brow, or middle and low brow, depending on the critic). Cameron effectively elevates his work by declaring *Titanic* a film, prompted by the recognition of the Director’s Guild of America. Cameron’s contrast of *Remains of the Day* and *Terminator 2* is especially resonant for *Titanic*’s status. If *Titanic* is indeed half disaster (or action) flick, half period romance, Cameron has chosen his examples well: for *Remains of the Day* is itself a period romance, and *Terminator 2* part of the action genre. In blending these elements, *Titanic*, according to Cameron, has transcended the status of movie to become film. And because the film itself is concerned with high art and taste, the distinction is an important one according to the film’s own terms.

The “disaster flick” elements of *Titanic* cannot be ignored, given the last half of the

film; but there is an extent to which the film itself engages in negotiation of the inclusion of that genre's elements. The present-day frame of the film, which involves not only old Rose but also a team of scientist-explorers searching for the "Heart of the Ocean," offers a platform for this negotiation. Brock Lovett, who heads the expedition, videotapes himself, narrating the approach to the sunken ship: "she landed at two-thirty in the morning of April 15th, 1912, after her long fall from the world above"; to this pseudo-poetic description, Lewis Bodine replies, "You are so full of shit, boss," thus undercutting the grandeur of Lovett's narration. Janet Maslin argues that Cameron "treats these explorers as big 90's hotshots, the kind of macho daredevils who could just as easily be found tracking twisters or dinosaurs in a summer action film" ("Spectacle" E18); in fact, Bill Paxton, who plays Brock Lovett, also played one of the main characters in *Twister* (1996). Lovett's narration betrays a "pretentiousness" (Krämer 120), presumably because his reverence is performed, rather than sincere. Diane Nera views the juxtaposition of Lovett and Bodine's narrative devices with old Rose's narrative as "something of a storytelling contest" (228). As Adrienne Munich and Maura Spiegel write, "[t]he frame shows us the construction of better manhood (and better movies) through the transforming tale of the *Titanic* as recounted by a liberated woman" (162); indeed, the scientists in *Titanic* set up the expectations of a disaster film, which will then be at least partly undercut. A telling scene involves Bodine's brief explanation of the ship's sinking, accompanied by computer graphics. Unlike the film itself, and its depiction of the sinking, Bodine's description is short and reductive, not to mention irreverent. Describing the ship's stern jutting out of the water, Bodine declares, "her whole ass is sticking up in the air . . . and that's a big ass." Old Rose undermines Bodine's irreverence: "Thank you for that fine forensic analysis, Mr.

Bodine. Of course, the experience of it was somewhat different.” Thus, the film invokes the disaster genre in order to defuse it through Rose’s personal experience; it is her narrative, her memories of Jack, which preclude the film from being a strict disaster flick. The irreverence of Bodine is not only undone by his character, when he later urges Rose to continue her personal narrative, but also by the reverence of the film itself (presented as sincere in opposition to Lovett’s early narration). The frequent inclusion of angelic-sounding voices singing on the soundtrack, particularly during scenes that present the ocean, brings spiritual overtones to the film.

That the reverence and partial denial of the disaster genre should be invoked through a female character’s voice and recollections, along with all the elements of display, implies that the film becomes feminized. The narrative of *Titanic* has been displaced from the masculine world of Brock Lovett and Lewis Bodine. As Lehman and Hunt note, “the frame story even constructs the investigation of the sunken ruins as a voyeuristic masculine enterprise. ‘Are you seeing this, boss?’ an assistant asks as a robot’s arms caress the body of the ship” (93). Furthermore, penetration becomes part of this enterprise when the crew’s robot device—Snoop Vision—is sent into the wreckage to retrieve Cal Hockley’s safe.

Peter Krämer argues compellingly that Lovett

can be seen as a stand-in for director James Cameron, another man obsessed with the *Titanic* who did go down to see and film the wreck, and a filmic storyteller who takes command of complex technology to achieve his goal. What happens in the prologue is the undercutting of Cameron’s position, first by the comments of Brock’s assistant and then, more importantly, by his reluctant handing over of the role of storyteller to Rose. It is as if

Cameron declared that this story and this film belonged to the woman on the screen, and also, by implication, to the women in the audience.

Rose's tale presents a shift away from the masculinized narrative, but the last half of the film, which "operates almost as a self-contained one-and-a-half-hour-action movie" (Krämer 114) may reassert *Titanic*'s masculinity, just as Cameron returns the film to the genre for which he is better known. Some critics privilege the love story over the destruction spectacle in assessing the film's popularity; for instance, Melanie Nash and Marri Lahti point out that Cameron "is careful to characterize his film as a love story rather than a disaster film" (65). But an analysis of the film needs to address both the romance and disaster narratives. While sixty percent of the film's audience was female, the male viewers constituting the other forty percent (Nash and Lahti 64) are presumed to have enjoyed the film primarily for its action sequences: "Guys unimpressed by Winslet's stunning dresses might rustle around their seats a bit until *Titanic* [*sic*] hits the iceberg, but after that they'll be hooked" (Barnard B6).

As J. Bruce Ismay explains in the film, the name of the ship (and by extension the film) is meant "to convey sheer size, and size means stability, luxury, and above all, strength." The events of the film, however, prove that the ship fails to live up to its name and the masculine traits (i.e. size and strength) it is supposed to represent. Indeed, the largest failing—that of not being able to save all the passengers—is revealed to be a fundamentally cosmetic issue: ship designer Thomas Andrews admits that the original plans could "take an extra row of boats, inside this one, but it was thought by some that the deck would look too cluttered"; consequently, the feminized concern with display constitutes a major element of the tragedy. The strength of the *Titanic* ultimately turns on

itself and on its passengers in the sinking sequence, a sequence that appears to effect a re-masculinization of the narrative, as well as of Jack. Rose is entitled to a few masculine, heroic moments (spitting in Cal's face, cutting Jack's handcuffs with an axe), but it is Jack who is ultimately in charge. Jack is heroic prior to the ship's sinking when he pulls Rose back over the stern, but his heroism increases in relation to the disaster. Jack initiates the use of the bench as battering-ram to free the working-class passengers from the lower decks. And while the attempt to save a single working-class child fails when the father runs the wrong way down a passage, into the oncoming flood, Jack is granted the spectacle of the hero: he carries the child in his arms, running down the passage as Rose follows. He also retrieves keys underwater in order to unlock the gate that imprisons him and Rose. Further, he leads Rose to the stern of the *Titanic*, instructing her to hang onto the ship. Once in the water, Jack punches a man who pushes Rose underwater, and takes her to a piece of wreckage to keep her safe. Jack's heroism operates in relation to the excess of disaster, asserting his masculinity. Old Rose claims, "he saved me, in every way that a person can be saved."

Nash and Lahti acknowledge that apart from the appeal of DiCaprio to the teenaged girl audience, "[i]t has also been argued . . . that *Titanic*'s success with girls rests with Winslet's character, Rose, and the narrative of her liberation" (69). As narrator, old Rose claims that the *Titanic* initially seemed to her "a slave ship, taking [her] back to America in chains." The declaration that the *Titanic* was a slave ship from the perspective of an upper-class white woman is quite preposterous, especially given the slave ships that formed an actual part of American history; but the film goes to great lengths to indicate that Rose is trapped, most specifically by her engagement to Cal, wherein she is "traded to him by her

mother” (Munich and Spiegel 150), and more generally by the stifling societal norms of the upper class. As Lehman and Hunt point out, “tropes of entrapment and escape are woven throughout the narrative: characters repeatedly escape from handcuffs, break through locked gates, and open and relock a safe” (93). After her suicide attempt, Rose is presumably rescued from “the inertia of [her] life” by Jack, who takes her to “a real party” in steerage and teaches her how “to spit like a man.” Some critics argue that the film accords Rose a great deal of agency: “throughout the last ninety minutes of *Titanic*, Rose fully participates in the physical action, shedding clothes to be able to use (and also display) her body to greater effect, skillfully employing an ax, even hitting people, and running, wading, and swimming in a most unladylike fashion” (Krämer 115). In fact, Rose’s employment of the ax has more to do with blind luck than with skill (indeed, she closes her eyes), and while she is not the most conventional damsel in distress, her heroics pale when measured against Jack’s. In contrast to Jack, who is decisive in taking action, Rose tends to follow his orders or suggestions. Indeed, to a certain extent, her narrative of liberation simply functions as a backdrop for her lover’s heroics, and her escape from the constrictions of upper-class life is realized entirely in relation to Jack. Munich and Spiegel identify the life Rose goes on to lead after the ship’s sinking as corresponding to Jack’s “vision of her”:

The photographs old Rose brings aboard the *Keldysh* make this point explicit: Rose beside a plane (Jack’s singing ‘Josephine and Her Flying Machine’ into her ear before they first kiss); Rose on a horse, not sidesaddle, in front of a roller coaster (their conversation about the Los Angeles pier Jack used to frequent and his promise to teach her to ride horses and roller

coasters); Rose with her family (his dying demand that she survive, have children, live long). (165)

Essentially, Jack has “authorized her agency, turned into a ghost, enabling her to choose life in the name of his bodiless spirit” (166). Rose’s liberation is sealed, both visually and narratively speaking, when “[s]ailing beneath the Statue of Liberty, she renames herself ‘Rose Dawson’” (166). Hence, not only is Rose’s “accomplished life . . . presented as the fulfillment of her contract with Jack,” but that contract “is discursively figured as a marriage” (Nera 227). While her life following the *Titanic* sinking indicates elements of masculinization of her character (as evidenced by the photographs), this life has been made possible through a kind of marriage.

Keller argues that Rose’s class status continues to be significant even after the sinking of *Titanic*. As the photographs that document Rose’s “adventurous but *expensive* life” suggest, she has not “really renounced her class,” but instead “rejected . . . its most obviously repugnant values” (146). Instead of viewing Jack as working-class, as his steerage accommodations aboard *Titanic* suggest, Munich and Spiegel locate him in the context of “the solid middle class of the Middle West”; in fact, Jack’s artist status allows him to “exis[t] outside the class system” (160). It is this classlessness/middle-class existence (the two being one and the same according to American mythology) that Rose ultimately embraces: “We first encounter her as the camera focuses on her hands working a piece of clay; as the camera tracks back, she is situated in a very comfortable house, a middle-class house . . . A middle-class life, the movie tells us, *is* the creative life” (160). Through Jack’s suggestions, Rose has attained “the historically male-coded freedom to pursue the American Dream” (Ouellette 180). Indeed, when Rose changes her name

beneath the Statue of Liberty, her identity becomes a *tabula rasa*; surrounded by survivors from steerage, she becomes an immigrant like them, one who ultimately does achieve the American Dream.

Rose can live the life Jack wanted for her because his heroics prevent her from becoming a casualty in the “spectacle of mass death” (Rich A11). If Rose forms part of the spectacle of the ship in its splendour, she has not been included among the thousands who freeze to death. The deaths portrayed during the sinking are themselves dramatic: many fall off the ship, one man hitting a propeller on the way down. Although the narrative of *Titanic* is ostensibly Rose’s memory, many events could not possibly have been witnessed by her character, both before and after the ship hits the iceberg. But it is the sinking sequence that takes the camera’s position to its extreme, letting the female and feminized narrative go. Rose’s narrative is reasserted by the film’s conclusion, where it is not her memory but her subconscious or soul that forms the perspective. The film reveals old Rose asleep, dreaming of the *Titanic*; however, the film’s more powerful suggestion is that Rose, having told her story, is free to die and to reunite with her lover. In fact, it seems that Rose’s only reason for contacting Brock Lovett has been to get as close as possible to the *Titanic*, tell her tale, and rejoin Jack: while Lovett has been seeking the “Heart of the Ocean,” Rose has had it all along; the night of her death, she throws it into the sea without ever telling him it was in her possession. Presumably, the diamond is meant to sink towards the wreckage. But after the massive scenes of destruction, the film restores the original spectacle of *Titanic*, not only by returning the ship to its splendour as the underwater wreck dissolves to a restored version of itself, but also by returning Rose to her youthful self: it is Kate Winslet, not Gloria Stuart, who meets Leonardo DiCaprio at the

top of the wooden staircase. The “socially integrated” audience, comprised of “passengers from all decks” (Krämer 121-22) of *Titanic* applaud, making a spectacle (much like the film does) of their reunion as Jack and Rose kiss.³ The camera tilts up to the glass dome, “the white light of eternity” (Munich and Spiegel 166), asserting the supremacy of the ship’s spectacle before fading out to the film’s credits. The reinscription of the love story returns the film to its feminized narrative, and mutes the masculinization of Rose. The final scene also appears to realize Rose and Jack’s “spiritual” (Munich and Spiegel 166) marriage, first suggested by Rose’s changing her name to Dawson. Rose wears a white dress when she ascends the stairs to meet Jack, who is waiting for her; the applause that accompanies their kiss is not unlike that at the end of a wedding ceremony. Not only does the love story assert its supremacy, then, but personal tragedy and mass destruction and death are also undone by the celestial resolution, represented by the restored ship and its passengers.

The resounding global success of *Titanic*—specifically the huge audience numbers it has drawn—has meant that “hundreds of millions of people will eventually have this experience in common” (Riding II 1). Here, the film seems to parallel the Academy Awards, where it won in eleven categories, tying *Ben-Hur* for the record for most Oscars won by a single film. And, because records seem to follow in *Titanic*’s wake, the Oscar broadcast that so honoured *Titanic* drew “the biggest audience ever for the annual special” (Carter E7): “*Titanic*’s popularity was widely recognized as a key factor in its success” (Wyatt and Vlesmas 39). The exposure of the film mirrored the exposure of the Oscar telecast, and the fact that “[l]ike all megahits, the movie has become a kind of religion”

(Ansen 60), certainly fits the Academy Awards' ritualistic aspects. As a symbol of American show business, the Academy Awards most certainly provide a reflection of what is valued by the industry. For 1997, *Titanic* appeared to dictate Hollywood values through its public reception and Academy recognition. The spectacle of the film corresponded to the glamour of the Oscar ceremonies: "This year, there is a movie whose hefty dimensions meets the Oscar hype" (Lacey, "Overboard" C1). In his prediction of *Titanic*'s Oscar victory, Liam Lacey outlined the following reasons for the film's inevitable success:

1. It has the most nominations. The most nominated film has won 21 of the past 25 years.
2. It's historical. In the past five years, only historical pictures have won. In the past 20 years, only six winners have been set in the present day.
3. It has big production values. Twelve of the past 15 winners have also won best art direction.
4. The hero dies. Fifteen of the past 20 winners saw the death of a main character or someone close to him.
5. It's really popular. Most Oscar winners are box-office successes as well. ("Overboard" C1)

Of Lacey's six reasons for *Titanic*'s victory, four of them have to do with the film's relationship to excess, one that he expected (correctly) to be awarded on Oscar night. The Oscar stage itself was built to reflect the glamour of *Titanic*:

Even the stage of the Shrine Auditorium has been redesigned to hark back to old-fashioned elegance, combining set design elements of the less seamy side of *L.A. Confidential* with the ballroom of *Titanic* [sic]. "I'm

using old gold mosaic, crushed velvet, silver leaf, a large 50-foot mirror ceiling for a Busby Berkeley effect,” stage designer Roy Christopher told *Variety* [sic] last week. “Last year was sparer. This year is opulent, with a set that may be likened to an old movie palace in a nineties frame.”

(Lacey, “Overboard” C1)

Titanic becomes linked to expectations of glamorous film viewing, even in the context of the spectator, invoked through the movie palace. The film literally set the stage for the Academy Awards; furthermore, both *Titanic* and the Oscar stage can be said to have “a nineties frame.” And in terms of the Academy’s values reflecting the state of the industry, it is important to remember the previous year as one where independent films were the most featured. Peter Waal identifies *Titanic* as “a story of salvaged glamour, a sign that the grand Hollywood movie can rise again” (34); and according to David Gritten, “Hollywood has reasserted itself, with *Titanic* proving a perfect rallying point” (20).

Not only the stage, but also the staging and the ceremony for the 1997 Academy Awards afforded *Titanic* the opportunity of increased spectacle. After Billy Crystal’s filmed sequence that inserted him into the nominated films, a sequence that focused more on *Titanic* than any other picture, Crystal entered on the bow of a ship, lowered to stairs that led to the stage. Crystal himself linked *Titanic*’s features with the Oscars’: “We are just like that great ship. We are huge, we are expensive, and everybody wants us to go a lot faster.” Because 1997 marked the 70th anniversary of the Academy Awards, Oscar night was a celebration of itself; the success of *Titanic* was therefore bound up in the Academy’s self-celebration, and in some ways became synonymous with the Academy and its expectations. In a clear fusion of *Titanic* and the Oscars, Céline Dion sang the film’s

theme song, “My Heart Will Go On,” while wearing a necklace designed after the “Heart of the Ocean.” Thus, an element of spectacle from the film became part of the Oscar spectacle. Dion also enjoyed the most spectacular surroundings of all the singers. Her performance immediately followed that of Elliott Smith, who stood alone on stage with his acoustic guitar. During Dion’s song, however, smoke filled the stage behind her, and an orchestra above accompanied her singing. *Titanic*’s spectacle increased with each nomination and clip which accompanied it, and with each win where a clip of the film accompanied the winner(s) to stage; further, the winner(s) could draw attention to the film in their acceptance speech(es). James Cameron came under criticism by the press for his acceptance speeches, particularly those for Best Director and Best Picture: Cameron “set a standard for orgiastic self-congratulation when he dubbed himself ‘king of the world’” (Pains” A22), a far cry from Oscar speeches that usually display “a degree of humility” (Weinraub E1). But like Dion’s necklace, Cameron’s self-appointment as “king of the world” marked a moment of fusion between the film and the ceremonies, the line belonging to Jack in the film (written, of course, by Cameron). When accepting for Best Picture, Cameron also asked “the audience to observe a few moments of silence for the *Titanic* [*sic*] casualties” (“Pains” A22), thus directing the Oscar spectacle itself.

Although Wyatt and Vlesmas declare that *Titanic*’s Oscar nominations and wins “[s]olidif[ied] a positive critical response” (39), like the Academy Awards themselves, *Titanic* was not unproblematically celebrated by critics.⁴ The film was described as variously as “awesome even when it’s awful” (Groen C1), “as trashy as it sounds” (Arroyo 17), “a big-screen spectacle with a soul” (Andrews D8), and “a simple-minded entertainment” (Miller 52). But there is also a sense that *Titanic* has been essential to the

Hollywood industry, not only because its financial success provided an “obligatory happy ending” (Wyatt and Vlesmas 42), but also because “it’s the kind of movie Hollywood believes in, has bonded its soul to, wants to see validated, needs to believe can blow the competition out of the water” (qtd. in Bernstein 24). As a film that upholds the American Dream in however an apparently qualified manner, *Titanic* expands the discourse of the American Dream through its Oscar success: if the Oscars themselves epitomize the American Dream, and *Titanic* epitomizes Hollywood filmmaking, the film becomes doubly intertwined with this discourse of aspiration and success.

Titanic may function as the embodiment of Hollywood spectacle, but, somewhat curiously, James Cameron has claimed that the film “is his indictment of mainstream commercial filmmaking” (Waal 34). What may or may not complicate the film’s seemingly ready insertion into American discourse is the fact that both Cameron and Céline Dion, who sings the film’s theme song,⁵ are both Canadian. Norman Jewison’s experience at the Academy Awards suggests that Canadians, to a certain extent, are viewed as foreigners by Hollywood. Cameron himself also views himself somewhat in opposition to the Hollywood industry: “I feel like I’m in it and I can do it, but I don’t feel I’m of it” (qtd. in Johnson 91); however, he has been honoured by Hollywood’s self-appointed taste-makers. Whether Cameron’s Canadian origins should influence readings of *Titanic* is debatable; but it is interesting that not a single essay in the critical collection, *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*, mentions Cameron’s Canadian birth, even though several essays discuss the film as a promotion of American values. Further, Cameron’s Oscar acceptance speech for Best Director has been described as “suitably American” (Edwards-Jones Metro 3). In contrast, Canadian news media have consistently referred to Cameron’s nationality:

The Toronto Star deemed the Academy Award nominations for 1997 as “Canada’s best Oscar show ever” (Howell E1) on the strength of Atom Egoyan’s two nominations and *Titanic*’s fourteen. Whereas Egoyan’s *The Sweet Hereafter* is designated as a Canadian film, *Titanic* certainly is not, and yet *The Toronto Star* inserted *Titanic* into a discourse of Canadian filmmaking by virtue of Cameron’s birth.

Cameron has found success in America, which was, in fact, the aspiration of the immigrants aboard *Titanic*. That the acquisition of the ultimate American symbol of success and recognition has been possible “even [for] someone from a small town in Ontario, Canada” (Heard 2) perhaps speaks to the power of the American Dream, and its apparent openness to Americans and non-Americans alike. Regardless of Cameron’s intentions, *Titanic* has come to encapsulate Hollywood filmmaking, through the film itself as text, the extratextual financial discourse that has surrounded the film, and the film’s Academy Award success and fusion with the Oscar spectacle. *Titanic* negotiates genre and gendered narratives, thereby negotiating Hollywood film traditions, but ultimately, it poses little challenge to dominant ideological trends: the *Titanic* appears to us in the context of feminized glamour, only to have that glamour punished with masculinized destruction sequences; Rose’s liberation is realized on Jack’s terms; and class critique, along with all other elements in the film, is secondary to spectacle. As “a Movie Event” (Stone E1), *Titanic* upholds spectacle and commercialism, and is therefore a perfect match for the Academy Awards that have traditionally embodied the same values. Using disaster as its subject while avoiding it as a commercial product in the marketplace, Cameron’s film managed to resurrect studio filmmaking at the Academy Awards after the year of the independents; intentionally or not, as self-appointed “king of the world,” Cameron in effect

reclaimed the Oscars for Hollywood.

Notes

1. Prior to *Titanic*, neither Kate Winslet nor Leonard DiCaprio was considered high-profile enough as a star to “‘open’ a film at the box office” (Wyatt and Vlesmas 29). Winslet’s initial appearance in the film certainly makes more sense in “star” terms following the film’s overwhelming success and Winslet’s subsequent increased stardom; however, the entrance is also part of what makes *Titanic* appear “to have been filmed in accordance with old studio practices” (Arroyo 18) of Hollywood’s Golden Age.
2. The fact that James Cameron pitched the idea for *Titanic* as “‘Romeo and Juliet’ on a sinking ship” (Brown and Ansen 66) underscores the importance of *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* to textual reflection on *Titanic*.
3. Julian Stringer notes that “[w]hile a final reunion scene magically resuscitates all the doomed passengers for a feel-good ending,” not everyone is included: the absence of Cal and his “spying henchman Spicer Lovejoy” (210) suggests that while the other passengers have made it to “the luxury liner to heaven” (“Hero” A28), Cal and Lovejoy have been condemned to hell.
4. For a more detailed overview of critical responses to the film, see Matthew Bernstein’s “‘Floating Triumphantly’: The American Critics on *Titanic*” in Sandler and Studlar.
5. For an examination of the significance of the theme song and soundtrack to *Titanic*’s success, see Jeff Smith, “Selling My Heart: Music and Cross-Promotion in *Titanic*” in Sandler and Studlar.

Chapter Three

The Invisibility Awards: Locating the Genies

Whereas the Academy Awards operate as a global point of reference, delivering a celebration of Hollywood to people around the world, the Genie Awards, often referred to as “Canada’s Oscars” by way of explanation, are all but invisible not only to the outside world, but also to the people whose nation is ostensibly reflected in the works the Genies celebrate. As Noreen Golfman notes, “[m]ost people squint tryingly when you ask them if they even know what medium the Genies honour” (7); and the people to whom Golfman refers are Canadian. But the status of the awards themselves is inextricably linked to the status of the film industry they celebrate, as well as to the Prime Mover of all awards shows, the Oscars. The Genies’ precursors, the Canadian Film Awards, scarcely resembled Hollywood’s biggest party, and clearly demonstrated the differences between the Canadian and Hollywood film industries. With the establishment of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and the subsequent introduction of the Genie Awards, the Canadian film industry appeared to define itself according to Hollywood practices.

The Genie Awards, however, perform an entirely different function than the Oscars. Because of poor distribution of Canadian films in Canada, the Genies offer an introduction of Canadian films to the Canadian public; most films nominated for high-profile Oscar categories need no such introduction. But the Genies are part of larger, connected projects: they reflect the attempt to conceive of Canadian cinema as a national and art cinema, thus demonstrating tendencies towards fixing the Canadian nation in some way while working in opposition to American culture. The situation becomes more

complicated, however, as the Genies, modelled on the Oscars while attempting to carve a niche for the celebration of Canadian films, exemplify Canada's profound ambivalence towards its powerful neighbour to the south. In addition, issues within Canada surface in the film industry and the Genies: tensions between Québec and English Canada have arisen, most particularly at the Canadian Film Awards; definitions of what is "Canadian" have figured in industry discourse; and the economic realities of the Canadian film industry are repeatedly invoked at Genie ceremonies. It is the ceremony itself that most clearly betrays the differences between Canadian and Hollywood cinema, the Genie celebration generally characterized by understatement and low ratings. Hence, the Genies attempt to create justification for celebration through the celebration itself in a larger attempt to construct and validate Canadian culture.

The Canadian Film Awards held their first ceremony in 1949. Unlike the Oscars, the CFAs were not awarded by an academy of cinema; rather, the awards were "[o]rganized under the auspices of the Canadian Association for Adult Education" (Magder 90). Although the Oscars have come to serve as model for awards ceremonies, and ceremonies for film in particular, the Canadian Film Awards initially looked to a different model to emulate as "[i]t was hoped that these new awards would be comparable in stature with the Governor General's Awards for literature" (Topalovich 1). Thus, the inspiration for the genesis of the CFAs came from a pre-existing celebration of Canadian cultural products. Indeed, in the first years of the Canadian Film Awards, winners were presented with "an original painting by a Canadian artist (including members of the Group of Seven) as a token of their achievement" (5), thus rewarding one medium with another in a circulation of Canadian culture.

While part of America's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' initial mandate was to elevate the status of the film industry, the CFAs resembled this mandate with their beginning objectives. At the inception of the Canadian Film Awards and the Canadian Radio Awards—administered by separate committees—the articulated goals were “recognizing significant Canadian creative effort, helping Canadians to understand the work of creative Canadian artists, and raising standards in the fields of film and radio” (1). The notion of mediating between Canadians and Canadian cultural products remained a particular function of the CFAs and the later Genie Awards. Throughout their history, the CFAs revealed a tension between remaining “distinctly” Canadian and succumbing to American or Hollywood influences. Maria Topalovich describes the first Canadian Film Awards as “far from glamorous. There was no hint of Hollywood in the modest award ceremony: no red carpet stretching from curb to lobby, no crowd surging forward in search of stars” (6). Indeed, Canadian politics, rather than film stars, have often had a strong presence in celebrations of Canadian film, a testament to the state's involvement in the Canadian film industry. At the first Canadian Film Awards, “Robert Winters, Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, was on hand to present the awards on behalf of Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent” (5); in the awards' second year, the Prime Minister presented the awards himself. The third Canadian Film Awards featured some star power thanks to the presence of Mary Pickford. Whereas *The Globe and Mail* declared that “[p]resentation of the awards was accompanied by comparatively little Hollywood-style fanfare” (National 8), the *Citizen* likened the celebration to “the pomp and dignity of a Hollywood preview” (Pickford 3), and *Food for Thought* claimed that it was Pickford's presence that “added glamor [*sic*] and excitement to the ceremony”

(“Canadian” 23). The addition of a film star to the celebration therefore transformed the event itself. Two years later, “movie glamor [*sic*] girl” (Barris 8) Dorothy Lamour also graced the Genies with her presence. But such glamour at the Canadian Film Awards constitutes the exception rather than the rule, although these moments of glamour certainly emphasize the tension between Oscar-emulation and the desire to remain distinct from Hollywood.

The chief characteristic of the Canadian Film Awards (and later, the Genies) appears to have been inconsistency. This quality surfaces not only in the sporadic appearance of movie stars, but in several other aspects of the awards presentations as well. While the first few years of the awards featured presentations in late April and early May, subsequent ceremonies took place in the summer, in May again for several years, and then most often in October. Not only did the date of the awards vary, but the location did as well. Ottawa hosted the first three CFA presentations before the awards moved to Toronto. The next year they moved to Montreal. Other locations for the Canadian Film Awards have been Stratford (1956) and Niagara-on-the-Lake at the Shaw Festival (1975). This varying of location was due to “the committee’s established policy of rotating the venue of the competition” (Topalovich 21). The later predominance of Toronto presentations for the CFAs (as well as the Genies) does reflect a more centralized, Hollywood-inspired system, in opposition to early attempts to incorporate changes of venue into the CFA system.

Other changes in the Canadian Film Awards have to do with the awards categories, as the CFAs altered to fit the shifts experienced in the Canadian film industry. These categories provide one of the clearest differences between the CFAs and the

Oscars. Whereas the Academy Awards have always been primarily concerned with fiction feature filmmaking, the CFAs often had no entries in the feature film category, and gave no best feature film award from 1954 to 1963; indeed, the CFAs' "emphasis on non-theatrical documentary and theatrical-short award categories clearly reflected the limits (and strengths) of Canada's film production" (Magder 90). The CFAs also bestowed awards for amateur filmmaking, and for a time included such category distinctions as government and non-government sponsored. Although the CFAs did not always name a Film of the Year, honourable and special mentions were often included apart from the winning films. Categories were added or deleted as the industry shifted. For the 1954 awards, the CFAs "agreed to ensure that the number of Honourable mentions would not exceed twenty percent of the entries in each category" in response "to criticism for granting too many awards in relation to the number of entries submitted" (Topalovich 26); the CFAs were therefore chastised for being too celebratory, and not drawing enough distinctions between films. Individual contributions to films were not recognized by the CFAs until the introduction of craft categories, beginning with the Canadian Society of Cinematographers' awards for colour and black-and-white cinematography. The first acting awards were given in 1968, the same year that Sorel Etrog's sculpture was used as the CFAs' statuette. Thus, after the initial years of winners receiving paintings, followed by the years in which certificates were granted instead (due to financial reasons), the CFAs adapted themselves to the Oscar-inspired practice of handing out statuettes to the winners.

Although the awards granted by the CFAs came to conform to the Hollywood model, in terms of both categories and the physical prize, the actual ceremonies

themselves displayed only occasional resemblances to the Oscars. The presentations varied throughout the CFAs' history. While the first Canadian Film Awards were attended by "400 members and supporters of Canada's burgeoning film industry" (Topalovich 5), later events were often scaled down in the form of "a private industry banquet" (29). The question of whether or not to grant public access to the CFAs often incited some controversy. In 1955, there was no public presentation due to the wishes of the Commissioner of the National Film Board, in opposition to the views of "the three sponsoring organizations of the annual event (The Canadian Association for Adult Education, the Canadian Film Institute, and the Canada Foundation)" who emphasized "the public information value of the Awards" (29). The 1956 awards were held in conjunction with a 35 mm International Film Festival in Stratford, where "noted filmmakers from Britain and the United States" (33) were in attendance. But for several subsequent years, the awards were "handed out at a private industry luncheon" (38) hosted by the Association of Motion Picture Producers and Laboratories of Canada (AMPPLC). The awards for 1964 marked a turn towards a gala event, a shift that coincided with "the beginning of an important era in Canadian film production—the era of the feature film" (65). Indeed, 1964 "marked the first time in eleven years that a dramatic feature film award had been presented" (65), to Claude Jutra's *A tout prendre*. The presence of higher profile products being celebrated thus resulted in an increased status for the awards event.

The CFAs received a great deal of criticism over the course of their history. Not only were categories constantly being reworked, but the voting system also came under scrutiny, particularly in 1965 when no Film of the Year was given despite strong

contenders, and in 1968, when “the jury . . . overlooked the official nominees” (Topalovich 82) and named Don Owen Best Director. But deeper controversies surrounding the Canadian Film Awards reflected larger cultural anxieties. The debate over whether to telecast the awards ceremony in 1966 brought such anxieties to the foreground. The Directors Guild of Canada was opposed to the broadcast, arguing “a poorly staged television show would cause irreparable damage to the CFA’s, and indeed the entire industry’s, credibility with the general public” (73). The press deemed the CFA show a “poor man’s copy of the Oscars” (73), pointing to the Canadian film industry’s failure at Oscar-emulation. The fact that this criticism emerged after a telecast, specifically, emphasizes the primacy of spectacle involved at the Academy Awards, and the importance of spectacle for other awards ceremonies, particularly where audience expectations are concerned.

Canada’s relationship with Hollywood was not the only fraught relationship that had consequences for the Canadian Film Awards; indeed, tensions between Québec and English Canada also took a toll on the CFAs. In 1973, independent Québec filmmakers did not enter films into the CFA competition, “[c]iting their chief reason as ‘lack of interest’” (Topalovich 93). Two years later, an “eleventh-hour boycott” by Québec filmmakers forced the cancellation of the Canadian Film Awards, which were to be “telecast live for the first time by the CBC on both the English and French networks” (101). Among the complaints of the Québec filmmakers was the CFA ceremony, which they described “as an imitation Oscars” (Knelman 32).

The cultural issues were not limited to the appeals to the Hollywood industry, however: the Québécois filmmakers also argued that to judge French- and English-

Canadian films together was a negation of the “two quite different societies and cultures”; the Canadian Film Awards therefore “projected a false image of harmony and homogeneity [*sic*]” (Topalovich 101). These filmmakers recognized the role of the Canadian Film Awards in attempting to establish Canadian cinema as a national cinema, and the cultural consequences of such an attempt: “To identify a national cinema is first of all to specify a coherence and a unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and a stable set of meanings. The process of identification is thus invariably a hegemonising, mythologising process” (Higson 37). Thus, the CFAs, and later the Genies, function as part of a larger cultural system that seeks to define what is Canadian in a unified manner. As a result of the 1973 boycott, the Canadian Film Awards were simply presented at a “sombre press conference” (Knelman 32) in Montreal. Following the boycott, it was recommended “that the English- and French-language industries develop and stage two separate awards ceremonies” (Topalovich 105). In 1975, only the English-speaking committee submitted a grant application for their awards, and so

the Treasury Board released all of the funds [of the CFA grant] to the English-language group. The understanding was that this exceptional circumstance would not be repeated, and that in future a grant would only be allocated if both industry committees submitted briefs indicating a concerted effort to present a truly national event. (105)

This decision by the Treasury Board involves a presupposition of what is “truly national,” and what is acceptable for Canada’s national identity. Clearly, the “false harmony” identified by the boycotting Québécois directors is an integral part of the Treasury Board’s definition of Canada.

As Robert Schwartzwald notes,

During the years leading up to Québec's 1980 referendum on "sovereignty-association," . . . an oft-repeated argument for "national unity" was that without Québec, Canada would be indistinguishable from the United States! This double bind of calling on Québec's "distinctness" but being unwilling to acknowledge it within a new constitutional arrangement explains why many Québécois feel they are held hostage by English Canada which, unsure of its identity, "needs" Québec to prove its difference. (18)

The 1973 boycott and the subsequent decision of the Treasury Board clearly demonstrate this dynamic of tension between English Canada and Québec, although, ironically, it was the Québécois directors who protested against the similarity between the CFAs and the Oscars. The Treasury Board insisted that the CFAs reflect their definition of the nation, one that presumably needs Québec to prove its difference. In an indirect way, these Québécois directors did, in fact, prove Canada's distinction from America, at least as far as film awards are concerned: while the Academy Awards can claim never to have cancelled their show, cultural issues in Canada and its film industry have loomed large enough to pre-empt the celebration.

The 1978 Canadian Film Awards narrowly averted the fate of the 1973 awards, though the near-cancellation was due to different reasons. Instead of cultural differences causing a split within the Canadian Film Awards, it was criticisms of the jury system, "dramatic threats of 'blackmail,' 'pull-outs' and 'court injunctions'" (Topalovich 121), which nearly prevented the awards presentation. The members of the Canadian

Association of Motion Picture Producers “insisted on a semi-academy style system, whereby all members of their association would receive nominating rights for the Best Feature Film category” (121). The Academy of Canadian Cinema was formed in 1979 (changing its name in 1985 to the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television), making a unified entity responsible for celebrating film, unlike the various associations that previously had been responsible for the Canadian Film Awards. This gesture away from fragmentation also included an explicit movement towards the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; indeed, the Academy of Canadian Cinema’s was first known as “the Canadian Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences” (124), a clear example of the Canadian film industry modelling itself on Hollywood practices. The mandate of the Academy of Canadian Cinema resembled that of the Canadian Film Awards: “to stimulate higher standards of filmmaking in Canada through the presentation of annual awards; to foster educational activities and special events; to develop public awareness of the industry; and to provide a forum for the various components of the industry” (125). After the formation of the Academy of Canadian Cinema, the Canadian Film Awards (sometimes known as the “Etrogs” following the introduction of the statuette) were renamed the Genie Awards: “A meaningful bilingual, catchy and marketable name was required” (126).

With the establishment of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and the introduction of the Genie Awards, the celebration of cinema in Canada underwent a facelift of sorts, one that brought the celebration of Canadian cinema closer than ever to the Oscar model. Topalovich describes the first Genies presentation as follows:

On March 20, 1980, Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre was the glittering setting for the Academy of Canadian Cinema's first annual Genie Awards. Attended by a capacity theatre audience of Canadian filmmakers and supporters, the awards presentation was hosted by television celebrity Bruno Gerussi and highlighted by such Canadian and international stars as Donald Sutherland, Margot Kidder, Jack Lemmon, Christopher Plummer, Helen Shaver, Lee Majors, and Louise Marleau, who participated as the evening's award presenters. The Genies were telecast live by the CBC television network. (127)

According to this passage, the Genie Awards introduced glamour to the Canadian film industry by adding celebrity and a "glittering setting." The issue of celebrity attendance is paramount, especially in relation to spectacle. If stars constitute a large reason why awards shows have an audience, then celebrity presence is a necessity in order for an awards show to have an audience at all, particularly if the cultural products being celebrated have not had wide exposure to the general public. Throughout the history of awards for Canadian cinema, "celebrities" have often included such figures as politicians, broadcasters, film critics, and comedians. Genie hosts, for instance, have included "well-known television interviewer Brian Linehan" (133); significantly, people such as Linehan are better recognized than many actors in Canadian films. But as Topalovich indicates, the first Genie Awards were attended by "Canadian and international stars," whose roles as presenters specifically relate to the ceremony's spectacle as many of these actors were not nominated for awards themselves. Their presence, however, presumably lends credibility to the awards from the point of view of the public. The fact that

“international” stars are present—meaning both Hollywood actors and Canadians who have had Hollywood success themselves—further this credibility.

The notion of international recognition is a long-standing issue for the celebration of Canadian film. Even while applauding Canadian films in Canada, the industry has consistently looked outside national borders for validation. Indeed, the CFAs took this external validation to the extreme, as they “relied on international jurors to decide the best Canadian movies and players; a colonial hangover that ended after the 1978 awards” (Adilman, “Canadian” D3). Topalovich’s *A Pictorial History of the Canadian Film Awards* also repeatedly refers to recognitions outside of Canada for those films celebrated within the country. Of *The Loon’s Necklace*, the first CFA winner for Film of the Year, for example, Topalovich notes that “the imaginative ten-minute colour film had already been named among the eleven ‘world’s most outstanding’ non-commercial motion pictures at the second International Festival of Documentary films in Edinburgh. It would continue to win awards and distinctions around the world” (5). To situate the film in a larger, international forum of awards does serve to uphold the quality of the film itself; however, drawing attention to an expanded context of film awards also validates Canada’s film awards. Canada need not justify its selection of awarded films if those films have already been singled out in other countries. The Oscars, not surprisingly, figure as the most important outside validation for films given awards in Canada. Topalovich explains that the National Film Board’s *Evolution*, which won Best Animated Film of the Year at the CFAs in 1971, “won ten international awards, including an Oscar nomination” (95). Significantly, the international awards the film actually won go unmentioned; the Oscar nomination, on the other hand, is treated by Topalovich as an

award in itself. Not only is it “an honour to be nominated” for an Academy Award, but the Oscar nomination eclipses any other awards that might be won. Thus, the Oscar asserts its primacy as model and cultural monitor even for films awarded in Canada. And while film awards given in Canada are meant to reflect Canadian culture and to celebrate what these films mean to Canada, appeals to international validation complicate the question of national celebration.

Nation, the international community, and the issue of “foreignness” are key to the Genie Awards and their relationship to the Oscars, primarily because of the national images of the countries which host the awards. At the Oscars, “foreign” films are those in a language other than English; indeed, Denys Arcand’s films, *Le Déclin de l’empire américain* (1986) and *Jésus de Montréal* (1989), have been nominated in the Oscars’ Best Foreign Film category. During the first years of the Genie Awards, “foreign” categories had to do with non-Canadian performers in Canadian films. These categories were controversial, for varying reasons. At the first Genie Awards in 1980, Canadian winners Christopher Plummer and Kate Lynch

attacked the academy’s special categories for Outstanding Foreign Actors and Actresses, but for opposite reasons. Lynch argued that Canadian performers were being overlooked and rarely cast in lead roles, so that winning in a category where the Canadian competition was minimal was meaningless. Plummer, on the other hand, urged Canadian performers to recognize themselves as international performers and to compete with Canadians and non-Canadians alike. (Topalovich 127)

What both these positions point to are the issues surrounding taking Canadians out of an international context. The problems of this national industry, and indeed, its insecurities, are revealed by the inclusion of “foreign” categories. In 1984, these categories were dropped; in 1985, the Academy voted to make non-Canadians participating in Canadian films eligible for Genie Awards. At the Oscars, nationality does not officially make a difference to nominations or awards; however, the majority of winning pictures and other award recipients are American. The Oscar ceremony itself is conducted in English, and most nominations are for films in English. At the Genies, Québécois films have had a substantial presence, in both nominated and winning films; however, there has been “a definite linguistic bias in the manner in which the Genies [are] presented to the public” (Conlogue, “Ghosts” C7); and the Genies have only been held twice in Montreal. Hence, the Genies have incorporated aspects of Québécois culture while allowing the culture of English Canada to dominate the presentation. In 1998, the Jutra awards were established to honour Québec cinema, without distinguishing along linguistic lines: “Any film financed in Quebec that has run for at least a week in a Quebec cinema during the past year is eligible” (Hustak B9). The awards were established as “a result of growing unhappiness in English and French Canada with the Genie Awards,” though Jutra chairman Roger Frappier claims, “It is not a question of regionalizing” the Genies; rather, the awards are a reflection of the fact that “[o]ften Quebec films that win Genies are never seen in English Canada” (B9). Thus, the Genies have not granted sufficient visibility to the Québécois films they honour.

While the Genies are not always successful in lending a higher profile to Québécois films outside the province in which they are made, influences from outside

Canada at the Genie Awards are clearly visible whenever present. The establishment of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and the reincarnation of the Canadian Film Awards as the Genies demonstrate elements of Hollywood practice. Although there were some positive responses within Canada to the first Genie Awards, the Genies' debt to the Oscar tradition did not go unnoticed. Film reviewer Leonard Klady claimed the Genies had "passed [their] first year with flying colors" by providing a "dazzling showcase of talent and movies" (17), but Jay Scott and Ron Base were more critical and up-front about Oscar-emulation: Scott declared the Genie show "a less expensive but smoothly operated clone of the American Oscar ceremonies" ("Changeling" 15); Base proclaimed, "Oscar had moved north, mated with a beaver and produced an offspring named Genie" (D1). Scott apparently saw the first Genies breaking with the past insofar as "perhaps for the first time, the awards were taken seriously, which is to say winners were ebullient and losers appeared to actually regret losing" ("Changeling" 15). But while the participants may have paid attention to the results of the awards, Base identified key problems that would continue to plague the Genie Awards, and that would be mentioned by film critics every year following the Genies presentation: "The Genies committed the cardinal sin of award shows and handed out awards to a bunch of movies no one had even heard of, much less seen" (D1). On this point, the Genie Awards can approximate neither the status nor the function of the Academy Awards. The Oscars are indeed a popular cultural product in themselves, and can be watched for the spectacle alone; however, the fact that the films honoured by the Oscars tend to be movies which already fit into the circulation of popular culture means that the Academy Awards do not need to explain themselves or the films to the public.

The two major points of comparison between the Oscars and the Genies, as far as the Canadian press is concerned, are the exposure of the films celebrated and the show itself. The press have tended to be quite repetitive in their analysis of the Genies' situation. John Griffin sizes up the reality of the Genie Awards as follows: "No one watches the Genies. Next to no one cares about Canadian movies" ("No One" C3). The Genies' difficulty is that they celebrate cultural products that are not well known to the public, nor widely circulated within Canada. Indeed, throughout the Genies' history, a successful year is one in which "the five nominees for best picture have all been shown in major Canadian theatres" (Adilman, "Something" E1) before the awards ceremony. As Paul McKie complains, a film need not receive substantial exhibition in order to be nominated: "A film may qualify that has never had a proper national release" as long as it has had "a limited engagement" (22) in one Canadian city. McKie goes on to argue that "[i]f these films are so celebrated, surely Canadians outside of metro Toronto should be given the opportunity to view them" (22). Of course, the difficulty Canadian films encounter trying to make their way to theatrical releases is not to be blamed on the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television. And it is difficult to make the public care about a low-profile awards show that celebrates films with only brief theatrical releases.

But there are larger, more deeply cultural issues surrounding the attitude of the Canadian public towards Canadian film. In 1997, David Weaver noted that "the improved quality of Canadian films hasn't been even remotely matched by an increase in the size of the audience" (C1). Weaver blames a discourse of cultural protectionism for keeping Canadians disinterested in their own film culture. While he recognizes that the paltry amount of screen time Canadian films receive in Canada (Weaver puts it at 3%)

does play a role, he also claims that “arguments that Canadians ought to flock to our films because they’re good for our national soul are not going to be successful” (C1). There are also aesthetic assumptions surrounding Canadian film, however, namely an assumption that anything that combines cinema and Canadian production will end in mediocrity at best. Topalovich blames the tax shelter years for the perception of Canadian films as being of poor quality: “horrible films with second-rate American stars and disguised locales” (MacInnis H8) hardly conjure up expectations of quality cinema for today’s Canadian films. As Topalovich summarizes the self-loathing typical of Canadians, “If it’s Canadian it can’t be good” (qtd. H8).

But the Canadian films that exemplify the “improved quality” of the Canadian film industry hardly appeal to the same audience as the Hollywood mainstream. A film such as *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould* is unlikely to find a mainstream audience in any country (though, as Weaver notes, it is somewhat perverse that the film should have received “a much wider release” in America than in Gould’s own country, where “its unapologetic Canadian subject probably hurt it” [C1]). Weaver argues that only “continued exposure to the public” will undo the Canadian public’s “perception that Canadian films are intrinsically inferior” (C1). But films in search of an audience have more than issues of nation with which to contend: “the absence of Canadian audiences for Canadian film has to do, at least in part, with taste” (Acland 282). Granted, for Canadians (particularly English-Canadians) and their relationship to popular culture, the two are difficult to separate. Whereas “the Quebec film industry has a high profile” (Griffin, “Montreal” C5), the same cannot be said for English Canada, with its “near total integration with U.S. cinema culture” (Acland 283). Popular tastes in English Canada

have been predominantly formed and attended to by Hollywood. Operating largely outside the context of popular culture, today's English-Canadian film industry can hardly expect to attract the same kind of audience as Hollywood productions. Canadian film occupies a kind of foreign status, even within Canada: "the 'foreignness' of Canadian cinema concerns its affinity with an international art cinema. Here, 'foreignness' does not designate a geographical distance from the country, but a distance from popular taste" (284). Because of the dominance of the Hollywood industry, and the difficulty Canadians films have in achieving substantial exhibition, this foreignness is perpetuated, and issues of taste become fraught when added to the question of nation.

According to Herbert J. Gans, "popular culture reflects and expresses the aesthetic and other wants of many people" (vii); presumably, then, American popular culture reflects and expresses the wants of much of the Canadian public. Of course, the question of how these wants have been shaped, and whether alternatives are easily accessible, must be entered into the equation. Canadian culture that has been celebrated in Canada (especially contemporary Canadian film of the "improved quality" Weaver mentions) tends to occupy the sphere of high culture, a notion that corresponds to trends in national cinemas. Steve Neale argues that the art cinemas of several European countries have functioned "both to counter American domination of their indigenous markets in film and also to foster a film industry and a film culture of their own" (11). A similar situation appears to exist in Canada, at least in critical notions of Canadian cinema that have "focused predominantly on the art to the utter neglect of the industry" (Dorland 10). If "high culture awards more status to creators than to performers" (Gans 78), surely this allocation of status can be found in contemporary Canadian cinema, where "directors

(Atom Egoyan, David Cronenberg) are more famous than its actors" (Lacey, "Dream" R1). The notion of "[c]ritics [being] sometimes more important than creators" (Gans 78) in high culture has had an interesting manifestation at the Genie Awards: at the televised Genies special for 1995, film critics Geoff Pevere and Cameron Bailey discussed the nominated films in various segments; and at the 1997 awards, Pevere and Bailey actually hosted the ceremony. Gans argues that in lower-middle culture, the audience "pays little attention to writers or directors, concentrating on performers" (86). As far as Canada and stardom are concerned, performers tend to become stars only after crossing the border. Granted, Canada simply does not have a system in place whereby stardom "can be manufactured through publicity" (Gamson 4). Canadians certainly do take an interest in celebrities, but the Canadian film industry itself is not bound up in a publicity machine of the magnitude of that which exists in the United States. Thus, the Canadian film industry is not tied up in the trappings of Hollywood popular culture, and issues of taste and Canadian cinema conflate concerns of nation with concerns of high, middle, and low brow. Gans declares that "the mere attempt to decide what culture is or is not in the public interest raises the possibility of cultural dictatorship" (123). Those Canadians who are concerned by the lack of public interest in Canadian cinema, therefore, have taken up a difficult position: "you cannot legislate Canadian films to the Canadian public" (qtd. in "Quotas" 47).

The Canadian film industry must contend with the "troubling gap between the critical and public taste for Canadian film" (Lacey, "Dream" R3) and the difficulty of getting Canadians to watch their own country on screen. But if the Genies are a representative institution of defining Canada, it is interesting to note that some films

nominated for Genies must have their Canadian qualifications explained to the press and the public. The question of who is responsible for acknowledging these qualifications demonstrates that there is a system in place that accepts or rejects cultural products on the basis of these criteria. The film, *Regeneration*, for example, was nominated for several Genie Awards in 1999:

Regeneration was shot in Glasgow and featured a host of British screen talent, including Jonathan Pryce. The movie bore no overt signs of Canadian content, but nonetheless managed to meet CAVCO (Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office) requirements as a result of its producers Allan Scott and Peter Simpson. (Monk C5)

The film also featured a Canadian cinematographer, Glen MacPherson, and a Canadian actress, Tanya Allen. Thus, the co-production occupies a peculiar position with respect to the Genies' function of national affirmation. *The Red Violin*, nominated in the same year as *Regeneration* (and winner of Best Picture, among several other awards), is also a co-production, but one which is more identifiably Canadian, thanks to its Canadian director (François Girard), Canadian writers (Girard and Don McKellar), a story-line set in Montreal, and some Canadian actors (McKellar among them). Because Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television rules stipulate that "[a]s long as the film meets CAVCO requirements, it's eligible for a Genie" (qtd. in Monk C8), films that do not appear overtly Canadian, as is the case with *Regeneration*, are still sanctioned by the promoter of taste for Canadian cinema; therefore, the national boundaries of the Genies are wider than what might be expected from what appears on screen. Canada need not be visible at all in order for a film to be certified "Canadian."

In a sense, it is partly the responsibility of the Genie Awards to convince the public to spend their money on what few Canadian films make it to the theatres; however, “[w]hile an Oscar win or even a nomination translates into box-office dollars” (Warren C10), the same cause and effect relationship is not enjoyed to the same extent by Genie-nominated or -winning films. If few Canadians see Canadian films, and few Canadians watch the Genie Awards, and the Genie Awards are not hugely successful in bringing more Canadians to Canadian films, then it appears as though the Genies fail to function as cultural monitor. In 1981, critic Jay Scott declared that the Genie nominations “reflected a concern with artistic merit notably lacking in the extravaganza staged by the Canadian Academy’s American inspiration and elder brother, Oscar”; indeed, Scott argued the Genies “may achieve a dangerous credibility” (“Debarras” 7) that, presumably, the middle-brow Academy Awards cannot claim. The Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television can celebrate Canadian films and deliver its stamp of approval on nominated and winning films, but the absence of an audience large enough to make a difference indicates that the Genies cannot reflect or shape public taste the way the Oscars can.

Perhaps some of the Genie “credibility” falls away at the Hollywood-envy evinced by the Golden Reel Award. First presented at the Canadian Film Awards in 1975 to *Lies My Father Told Me*, the Golden Reel was presented by the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association “to honour the highest-grossing Canadian film each year” (Topalovich 110) (the award is now sponsored by Blockbuster). Sid Adilman contends that such an award is not only ridiculous, given the small amounts of money made by many Golden Reel winners (often between one and two million dollars), but

also “odious” (“Titanica” D4) in its celebration of cash over art: “the Genies are all about creativity and not prompted by money making” (“Something” E1). But the fact that this “crass materialism prize” (Martin 19) is part of the Genie system demonstrates that commercial success is a concern for the Canadian film industry and the awards that celebrate it. Peter Harcourt has argued that “[a]s a collective cultural artifact, as something that informs and influences our lives on a day to day basis, the Canadian cinema remains an invisible cinema” (48); Harcourt insists that “[w]e must strive to make our product popular—to grant it visibility” (49). The Golden Reel, therefore, can function as a mark of visibility for the industry. Hence, the cultural monitor function of the Genies is also accompanied not only by a financial monitor but also a monitor of popularity and industry viability.

Of course, taste becomes an issue not only for the works celebrated by the Genies, but also for the Genie show itself as a spectacle in its own right. If the lavish ceremony of the Oscars is a fixture in popular culture, what can be said about the Genie ceremony? Whereas the Oscars enjoy a kind of ritualistic mystique, the Genie Awards, like the Canadian Film Awards, have had many inconsistencies throughout their history, from location to timing, to the show’s format, or even whether the show is broadcast live. The Genie Awards keep reinventing themselves from year to year, partly through attempts to better perform their function: not only to “celebrate the films that have been nominated,” but also “to raise overall awareness of Canadian films and filmmaking” (qtd. in “Lepage” C2). For most of the Genies’ history, the ceremonies were held in late March, dates very close to the Oscars. Any ritualistic aspects that might have been fabricated by the repeated dates were only overshadowed by the Genies larger, infinitely more popular

American counterpart. After the 1990 ceremony, “when the Genies garnered a paltry 391,000 viewers on CTV” (Anderson D2), the Genies did not reappear until November 26, 1991 on CBC. Throughout the last decade, the Genie Awards have also been held in December (1993, 1994, 1997), January (1996, 2000), and February (1999). But not only the dates have varied: Montreal has hosted the Genies twice (1993, 1995), while the 1999 show ventured out of Toronto to land in Mississauga; and the format of the show itself can alter drastically from year to year.

This last point demonstrates that the Genies are in search of an identity, as well as an audience. While in some years, the Genies have introduced such mainstays of the Oscar tradition as accompanying acting nominations with film clips (Scott, “Terry Fox” E1) or giving “precedence to the five best-picture nominees with extended clips, each introduced by a star” (“Naked Lunch” A1), other attempts at Oscar emulation have earned the ridicule of the Canadian press. Such features as “narcoleptic musical numbers” (Scott, “Terry Fox” E1) are so damned by the critics that Genie shows deemed “competently staged” (Scott, “Black Robe” A1) or “relatively high on entertainment value” (Harris C1) are smash hits in comparison. Granted, the Oscars have received their fair share of criticism, but the Academy Awards are deemed “spectacular” in the “awfulness” (Holden 77) of their event, whereas critics of the Genies have seen very little that is spectacular, even failure. The Genies have attempted in various years to depart from the traditional Oscar-type ceremony. In 1987, after the previous year’s “grindingly stale show” (Warren C10), the Genies changed their format to include skits about filmmaking. Awards show common sense dictates that celebrations without the “level of stars” (qtd. in Oswald B1) of the Oscars must find other means to entertain their

audience: ceremonies simply cannot sell themselves on their own. And of course, the Genies must look for ways to avoid being known as a perennial “spectacular non-event” (McKie 22). In some years, the entire ceremonies have not been broadcast live, with only selections of the presentations making it to television; however, this approach is not always popular, as *The Toronto Star*’s condemnation of the 1993 show as a “tape-delayed shmizzle of repackaged highlights from Montreal” (“Exotica” D1) demonstrates.

A drastic change in format came in 1996, when the Genies’ job of selling Canadian films to Canadians was more clearly incorporated into the show. The host of the television broadcast was Mary Walsh, but her presentation had nothing to do with the awards ceremony itself, “which took place earlier in the day in Montreal, and largely in French”: the ceremony, in fact, “took up less than half the 90-minute running time of the TV show” (Conlogue, “Language” C1). The television broadcast featured interviews with filmmakers and actors and “cheerleaderish interventions” (C1) by Geoff Pevere and Cameron Bailey. Only the speeches for the highest-profile categories (Best Actor, Best Actress, etc.) were included in the broadcast. Although this format was intended to inform the public about the films that were being awarded, it also had the effect of delivering “a TV show *about* an awards ceremony” (C1). This Genies broadcast therefore brought the awards show genre to a new level of self-reflexivity, one which involved not only the industry and its films but the celebration apparatus itself; the promotion of Canadian cinema doubled as the promotion of the Genie Awards.

The Canadian film industry, as portrayed and promoted by the Genie Awards, is not a satisfied industry, and the Genies are not a satisfied awards programme: if there is anything ritualistic about the Genie Awards, it is the constant references to the fragility of

the industry. Telefilm receives a great deal of thanks during acceptance speeches (and in recent years, Sheila Copps has been thanked at both the Genie and Gemini Awards). The Genies ceremony also operates as a forum for appeals for greater support of the Canadian film industry, particularly where distribution is concerned. The 1997 show also saw an appeal for a return to live broadcast of the ceremony itself. Thus, while celebration and promotion figure prominently at the Genies, there is always a sense of dissatisfaction with the state of filmmaking in Canada. The Oscars put forth the notion of movie magic, erasing the workings of the system that produces Hollywood films; in contrast, the Genie Awards, whether through a tribute to Telefilm or an impassioned speech by a winner, do not mask the industry or erase the context in which the films are made. Self-reflexivity is a feature of the Genies, including an awareness that these awards are largely invisible in their own country: at the awards for 1998, host Albert Schultz entered on stage and announced to the audience, "You came!" While the relocation of the Genies to Mississauga partly explains Schultz's facetiousness, there is also the sense that Mississauga is to Canada as Toronto is to America: Mississauga/Canada being smaller, quieter, and much less interesting. And the Genie Awards are the scaled-down version of the Oscars, where the stars are less well-known, the fashion much less ostentatious, and the proceedings are sometimes broadcast a day later, if at all. As co-host Pevere told the audience in 1997, "Just to clear something up, I know it's on all your minds, the answer to your question is because we were very very cheap." Indeed, financial concerns are so prominent for the Canadian film industry and the Genie Awards that in categories where there is a team of winners, only one Genie is given: the other winners must purchase their own statuette for \$600 (Brownstein E4).

We can only assume that if the Academy Awards were to require winners to buy their Oscars, it would be an industry scandal. But this point is not the only distinction between the Genies and the Oscars, even as the Genies have been modelled to a great extent on the Academy Awards. Canada has been celebrating films, through the Canadian Film Awards and the Genie Awards, for five decades, attempting to establish a vision for the film industry as well as for the nation; but there are few traditions that can be pointed to as a way to characterize or identify those awards. The constant revision of the Genies format demonstrates a desire to depart from the Oscar model, but perhaps because the Genies cannot possibly hope to *be* the Oscars: “‘It’s like the Genies are *trying* [to] be the Oscars,’ the critical have carped in years gone by” (Scott, “Importance” C1); and yet no one is ever fooled. But the Genies could not possibly attain the status of “the most successful self-promotional device any industry has ever invented” (C1), having for its context a different industry and a different country. As Scott argues, “smaller and relatively passive Canada does not and should not strive for that sort of supremacy, but there’s no harm in annually electing each other most popular in hopes that the contest will inspire a second look at the contestants” (C1). For many audience members, the Genie Awards offer the first look at Canadian films in a given year. In this way, the Academy only functions retroactively as a cultural monitor, and cannot enjoy the immediacy of popular cultural recognition. If the Oscars “are popular because viewers like to compare notes with entertainment-industry voters” (Oswald B1), the Genie Awards initiate a circle of celebration: they award the films, hoping to send the audience to the theatre, after which the audience can decide whether the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television got it right.¹

Notes

1. **My thanks to Charles Tepperman for his editorial suggestions for this chapter.**

Chapter Four

In *Titanic*'s Wake: *The Sweet Hereafter*, Celebration, and the Canadian Film Industry

In spite of the fact that, as Atom Egoyan has noted, “[b]oth *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Titanic* have big crashes with ice and water that take place halfway through the film” (qtd. in Lacey, “Tale” A2), these two films would seem to share little between them. They were made in the context of vastly different industries, according to different aesthetic concerns, with large discrepancies in their budgets and box-office grosses. But the Oscar nominations announced in February 1998 inserted *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter* into the same category, since both Atom Egoyan and James Cameron were nominated for Best Director. This grouping of the films together sets the stage for a deeper comparison of the films beyond Egoyan’s casual observation. These two films, released in the same year and featuring large vehicles crashing into or through ice, depict these accidents through opposite relations to spectacle. Whereas the last half of Cameron’s film portrays the sinking of the ship, the sinking of the bus in *The Sweet Hereafter* lasts only a few seconds, and is shot from a distance. Death itself becomes spectacle in *Titanic*; *The Sweet Hereafter*, in contrast, invokes death without representing it. The narrative of masculine heroics so important to *Titanic* is only invoked in *The Sweet Hereafter* to demonstrate its impossibility. Testimony is important to both films, but the narrative structures differ: *Titanic* shifts easily between present-day narration and Rose’s memories of the ship; *The Sweet Hereafter* confuses temporal relations without using the clear flashback structure of *Titanic*. *The Sweet Hereafter* won three prizes at the Cannes Film Festival, achieved a certain amount of recognition in Canada, winning eight Genie Awards and receiving two

Oscar nominations. But these moments of recognition for *The Sweet Hereafter* did not nearly enhance its spectacle to the extent that *Titanic*'s awards did. The relation of spectacle between the films and the awards shows which celebrate them reflects the status of spectacle within the films themselves: while both films involve accidents which can be deemed "tragic" in various ways, the distinctions between their representations offer major points of contrast. The Oscars, however, provide a point of intersection for *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Titanic*, and may function in some ways to level distinctions, even as the elements of the films themselves point to vastly different sensibilities in the treatment of a similar subject. *The Sweet Hereafter*'s Academy Award nominations are also significant not simply in themselves, but in what they have meant to the Canadian film industry and its self-perception and self-presentation.

The Sweet Hereafter is not based on an incident of the magnitude and publicity of *Titanic*,¹ but in both films, death comes as no surprise to the audience: in *Titanic*, because of its high-profile historical subject matter; and in *The Sweet Hereafter*, where the bus crash is taken for granted from the outset of the film. Although *The Sweet Hereafter* depicts incidents from before and after the school-bus accident, its chief concern is with the aftermath of the children's deaths and the lawsuit Mitchell Stephens attempts to set in motion. Unlike *Titanic*, which "sustains an extraordinary degree of suspense" (Maslin, "Spectacle" E18) in spite of its inevitable outcome, *The Sweet Hereafter* does not engage in creating suspense, just as it does not make the accident the sole focus of the narrative. Granted, with only a budget of \$4.2 million, *The Sweet Hereafter* can hardly be expected to portray the accident in a manner similar to *Titanic*, the size of the vehicle involved aside. *The Sweet Hereafter* appears to move in the opposite direction of *Titanic*, actively refusing

spectacle and relying a great deal on the unseen.

But the figure of the bus does play an important role in the film. Just as the first shot of the *Titanic* is of the sunken wreck, the first shot of the bus in *The Sweet Hereafter* occurs after the accident: Stephens looks through the garage window at the ruined bus and hears children screaming. A major distinction between the ship and the bus, however, is that the bus never enjoys the excessive splendour of *Titanic*: even before the accident, shots of the bus reveal it spattered with mud along the side. The bus functions as a point of reference for the viewer in terms of time frame. Because the film shifts from the present (the airplane) to various moments in the past—both before and after the accident—the status of the bus often orients the viewer. The bus is frequently shot from a high angle, driving along the road as Billy's truck follows. While these shots of the bus might be similar to the long shots of *Titanic* that show off the ship, they differ insofar as they do offer a context (the natural landscape always figuring prominently) and indicate the progress of the bus towards the hill where it will go off the road. The angle of the shots also heightens the powerlessness of the bus (or, more specifically, of Dolores, the driver), especially considering that the audience knows the outcome from the very beginning. The crash itself, "[t]he lone special effects shot" (Maslin, "Bereft" E13) of the film, also functions to minimize the potential disaster spectacle. As Egoyan writes, "In most films, accidents are designed to 'pay off' the audience visually. They are covered from a multitude of angles, the idea being to maximise the violence and destructive power of such events" ("Recovery" 23). In *The Sweet Hereafter*, the crash, unlike that of *Titanic*, is deeply rooted in the point of view of one character, Billy, who watches from the road. The crashing in *Titanic* takes up the second half of the film; in contrast, the bus crash in *The*

Sweet Hereafter occurs at 56:50 and lasts only a few seconds, captured “in terrifying long shot” (Pevere, “Death” 8). The children’s screams are audible, but the children themselves are not visible to the viewer. This non-representation of the children contrasts with a similar accident in the 1998 film directed by Mark Steven Johnson, *Simon Birch*: the accident scene, the climax of this film, lasts several minutes, and is shot mostly within the sinking bus itself, complete with frantic children scrambling to escape.

In *The Sweet Hereafter*, the children’s struggle to survive the bus accident is not the only missing spectacle: death itself goes unrepresented in the film. Geoff Pevere identifies this issue as one which separates Canadian film from American film (Pevere having collapsed American cinema into standard Hollywood product). For Pevere, death in American film “tends to be an event, either a cathartic punch line that snaps the intricately crafted spell of suspense . . . or, in revenge terms, a convenient motivating agent” (“Death” 6). Pevere argues that this spectacle surrounding death is necessary because “the only fate worse than death in contemporary Hollywood-think is stasis, the suspension of interest caused by even the slightest lapse in action” (6). In contrast, death in Canadian film is “a rare spectacle”; in fact, according to Pevere, it “seldom plays out on screen” (8). He uses the bus crash in *The Sweet Hereafter* as an example to illustrate this point, and to argue that in Canadian cinema, “probing [death’s] effects” (8) is more important than the visual portrayal of death itself. Although the bus crash might be portrayed through special effects, death itself in the film is not present as point of view is dominant: Billy’s dead twins, for example, do not appear on screen; rather, the camera shows him nodding, presumably in identification of their bodies, before the bodies themselves are covered in Hudson’s Bay blankets. *Titanic* does not shy away from depicting dead bodies on a

massive scale; at the Academy Awards, the film's nominated make-up artists were said to have met "the challenge of designing death-like frozen face for hundreds of formerly festive passengers." In *The Sweet Hereafter*, Billy's grief and the horror of his witnessing the crash supersede the importance of the spectacle of death. Pevere's point about Hollywood's avoidance of stasis is also appropriate as a point of contrast with this film: the bus sits still on the frozen lake for a moment before sinking. Sarah Polley has characterized Egoyan's films as allowing "characters . . . to have the stillness that people have in real life" (qtd. in Winters 26); thus, even Billy's grief is still. Whereas stillness in *Titanic* comes mostly in the form of a pose or a dead body, *The Sweet Hereafter* depends upon stillness for its contemplation of the aftermath.

Also missing from *The Sweet Hereafter* is a spectacle of heroics. In *Simon Birch*, the bus crash presents an opportunity for Simon, the film's diminutive hero, to live out his desire to become truly heroic as he takes charge of the disaster and gets the other children out of the bus, sacrificing himself in the process; Simon is closer to Jack in *Titanic* than any of the characters in *The Sweet Hereafter* are. Billy witnesses the school bus crash, but is powerless to act, and cannot save even his own children. Mitchell Stephens enters the town following the accident, claiming a kind of belated hero status: he offers to "direct [the] rage" of the town's grieving parents, and to "make [whoever is responsible] pay." Wanda Otto, at first skeptical of Stephens, identifies his attempts to win her and her husband over to the case: "So you're just what we need. Isn't that what you want us to believe, Mr. Stephens? That you know what's best for us?" Although Stephens admits he cannot compensate the parents for their losses, he does posit himself as a kind of hero figure, redressing wrongs, even if only in a financial capacity. But this attempt, too, ends in

failure. The film often teases the viewer with moments of spectacular action or heroism, only to subvert these moments by not having them occur at all. At one point, Stephens invokes the possibility of heroics when he describes his daughter's poisoning by baby spiders, and his willingness to perform an emergency tracheotomy if necessary. But ultimately, the procedure is not necessary, not held up to the viewer as spectacle. Similarly, Billy's threat to injure Stephens comes to nothing: "Tell me, would you be likely to sue me if I was to beat you right now? I mean beat you so bad you'd piss blood and couldn't walk for a month." In the course of this conversation, Stephens claims, with reference to his own daughter, "We've all lost our children. They're dead to us." Zoe's "death" to Stephens, and his inability to perform heroically to save her from her drug addiction, precedes the events of the bus crash. Indeed, parental—specifically paternal—impotence is invoked at the film's beginning, when Stephens' car is trapped in a car wash while he talks to Zoe on his cell phone. Bert Cardullo views the car wash entrapment as "a metaphorical equivalent of the children's entrapment in the sinking school bus" (109), but Stephen's powerlessness here is humorous, even ridiculous, as he attempts to escape the car wash with an umbrella to protect himself. Impotence, particularly on the part of the father figures in the film, is part of the absence of heroism and spectacle; a masculinized narrative like that of *Titanic* seems impossible. Robert Fothergill has explored the pattern of "radical inadequacy of the male protagonist" ("Coward" 236) in Canadian cinema, but rather than being simply "shallow, insincere, manipulative" ("Coward" 239), the male characters of *The Sweet Hereafter* are crippled by their circumstances (rather than just their nationality). Because so much of *The Sweet Hereafter* is situated in the aftermath (even multiple aftermaths, such as those of Zoe's addiction and

the death of Billy's wife), heroics are simply too late.

An absent heroic figure also highlights an emphasis on community rather than the individual. In contrast to the disaster of *Titanic*, which occurs on a massive scale and involves thousands of people who have little connection to each other, the bus crash in *The Sweet Hereafter* involves a small community; indeed, the surviving members can name the children who died. The film's narrative structure reflects this community and its brokenness, a brokenness brought on not only by the accident but also by the fragmentation which ensues after the lawsuits are introduced. No single character's point of view dominates. Nicole provides the only voice-over narration, somewhat similar to Rose in *Titanic*. Scenes where Nicole is absent are often accompanied by her singing on the soundtrack, her voice pulling the scenes together. But *The Sweet Hereafter* does not depict her experiences alone, nor even her experiences primarily; each character has his or her own contribution to the tragedy and its effects.

The representation of time in the film also reflects the community's brokenness. Concerns with time are present in both *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, though to varying degrees. Anthony Lane writes of *Titanic* as part of James Cameron's "obsess[ion] [with] the bending and shaping of time" (157). Lane seems to overstate his case somewhat, for while *Titanic* has a flashback structure, motivated by Rose's memories of Jack and of what happened to the "Heart of the Ocean," this flashback structure is straightforward. There is no confusion between present and past, for the lines of temporality are quite clearly demarcated: the actors are all different in the present-day frame and the 1912 narrative; and the setting differs, too, between the wreck of *Titanic* and *Titanic* as a new, lavishly designed ship. Whereas *Titanic* moves between the present expedition and a linear

flashback structure, *The Sweet Hereafter* is more confusing, since even the scenes set in the past do not unfold in a linear fashion from one to another. The gap in time from present to past in *The Sweet Hereafter* is also much smaller than that of *Titanic*. The distinctions between before and after are often coded by Nicole (i.e. whether or not she is in a wheelchair) and by the bus (i.e. whether it is moving or sitting outside the garage, covered in tape that reads: WARNING RESTRICTED AREA). The condition of the bus after the accident seems a much less dramatic version of the sunken *Titanic*, mostly because the bus is framed by its local context, and it symbolizes how its ruined condition has altered the community. Without these visual cues, the viewer might be completely disoriented as the film “shift[s] constantly and fluidly among more than 30 time frames” (Winters 26). As Egoyan himself has explained, “When people have suffered loss, their sense of time has been ruptured” (qtd. 26). The ruptured time of *The Sweet Hereafter* involves all of the characters, even Stephens, who is not grieving because of the accident, but for his own troubled daughter. The transitions between present and various moments in the past speak to a collective disorientation of the characters in their state of grief.

Shifts in time, in both *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, create a platform for the presentation of memory and testimony. Egoyan’s film thematizes memory itself as two central characters encounter difficulties remembering: Nicole cannot recall the accident (“Don’t even try remembering,” her father says); and Stephens does not remember Allison, his daughter’s childhood friend, or her father, his former business partner. Coupled with the confused chronology of the film, these lapses of memory create a narrative of uncertainty, unlike the certainty which drives the narrative of *Titanic*: while old Rose can declare, “it’s been 84 years, and I can still smell the fresh paint,” characters like Nicole

cannot unproblematically lay claim to such assertions. Rose narrates her memories to others, as do Dolores and Nicole in *The Sweet Hereafter*. Testimony figures in both films: Rose bears witness to the *Titanic* sinking, and Dolores and Nicole bear witness to the bus crash in *The Sweet Hereafter*; these female characters all narrate their memories for an audience. Dori Laub theorizes the act of giving testimony, and describes the position of listener as “co-witness”: “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (57). This description of co-witnessing appears to apply to *Titanic*’s frame narrative, wherein the formerly cavalier crew members of Brock Lovett’s team become emotionally involved in Rose’s tale. Brock Lovett can be considered “the enabler of the testimony,” for, in a sense, he “triggers its initiation” (58) by asking Rose, “Are you ready to go back to *Titanic*?” But there is a sense of superiority in Rose’s storytelling, particularly a moral one, since Lovett wishes to know the fate of the “Heart of the Ocean,” and she refuses to divulge this information and contribute to his financial gain. To a certain extent, Rose’s testimony acts to distract Lovett from what he really wants to know. Conversely, Lovett can be considered a problematic enabler, since he is less interested—initially, at least—in Rose’s personal history than in the diamond. Rose restores Jack to history (“Now you know there was a man named Jack Dawson”), but there is no real sense of urgency in her tale, perhaps because of the decades that separate the present from the events she narrates; but also, her life after the sinking, as displayed by her photographs, has been one of ease and personal fulfillment. Thus, memory serves the task of uncovering in this film. Testimony in *The Sweet Hereafter*, in contrast, unfolds much closer to the accident, and is bound up in complicated ways with the notion of recovery. It

also takes on explicitly legal implications, for Dolores tells her story to Stephens, a lawyer, and Nicole tells hers as a deposition in the presence of Stephens, another lawyer, and a court stenographer. Like Brock Lovett, Stephens presents a problematic enabler figure, since his financial gain is intertwined with the success of the case for which he wants these characters to testify; the lawsuit also addresses his personal needs, however, as it presents a “surrogacy” (Ansen 73) that helps him deal with his problem with Zoe. Nicole’s testimony is especially complicated in that it is, to a certain extent, coerced. She understands she has little say in the matter, as is evidenced by her question, “What is it you want me to do for you, Mr. Stephens?” After the scene in which she overhears Billy urging her parents to drop the lawsuit, however, she uses false testimony for the purposes of recovery.

The Sweet Hereafter’s aspects of recovery involve not only the accident, but also the other ways in which characters have been damaged. Nicole uses a lie in order to strike back at her father for his incestuous relationship with her: she performs memory during the deposition—at the community centre, significantly, for her actions will attempt to save the community from further fragmentation—by claiming that Dolores was driving too fast: “You remember this”; “Yes. I do now. Now that I’m telling it.” The “Pied Piper of Hamelin” lines, which Nicole recites throughout the film, “are always associated with either the legal activities of Mitchell Stephens or the incestuous acts of Sam Burnell” (Cardullo 111). During the deposition, it is especially clear that Sam, Nicole’s father has become the piper: “And why I lied, he only knew. But from my lie, this did come true. Those lips from which he drew his tune were frozen as a winter moon.” The close-up on Sam’s mouth leaves no doubt that Nicole identifies him as the piper. Her lie, intended to stop the lawsuit, also ends her father’s power over her, as though she breaks the spell the

piper has cast. Her lie is a spectacular one, for she claims to have been frightened at Dolores's driving, and to have been able to read the speedometer. But the real spectacle in Nicole's life has been the "love" scene between herself and her father in the barn, surrounded by candles. Nicole later reveals that Sam promised to build her a stage, "lit with nothing but candles"; thus, the scene in the barn has also functioned as spectacle and display. In a retaliation of sorts, Nicole invents her own spectacle/narrative of the accident. While Nicole's apparently returned memory of the accident would constitute a "recovery" by medical standards, recovery, for herself and for the community as well, is initiated by this performance of memory.

Nicole's lie, constituting the climax of the film, also serves as a reminder that the accident itself is not the most important element of the film: the accident is "what the film is 'about' from any one-sentence description," but, more importantly, "[i]t is the governing action which motivates the drama of the film" (Egoyan, "Recovery" 23) and makes the other narratives possible. The core moments of the film appear to be Nicole's lie (a kind of verbal heroics to save the town, and perhaps the only form of heroics available to a teenaged girl in a wheelchair) and Stephens' recollection of his daughter at three years old. The face of young Zoe fills the screen at various moments, not only during his narration to Allison of the poisoning incident, but also after Zoe, in her older incarnation, has informed him she has tested HIV-positive. Again, it is the stillness of Nicole as she speaks and the stillness of Zoe at three years old that form the centre of the film, rather than an explosive spectacle of the accident. Unlike *Titanic*, which portrays not only the lengthy disaster sequence but also the celestial restoration of the ship, *The Sweet Hereafter* offers no such resolution. The last shot of the bus presents it being lifted by a crane (though the crane is

not visible), the bus turning slowly in the air. The lifting of the bus might suggest an undoing of the sinking motion; however, the damage done to the bus, still visible at this point in the film, insists that the accident cannot be reversed. Similar to *Titanic*, with its final tilt up to the glass dome, *The Sweet Hereafter* ends with a bright light as Nicole, before the accident, approaches the window at Billy's house. But the similarity ends there; Rose's sweet hereafter that reunites her with Jack does not resemble Nicole's fate. Because the time frame that ends *The Sweet Hereafter* clearly occurs before the accident, it cannot have the restorative effects of the light in *Titanic*; rather, the light in Egoyan's film seems to function more as a retroactive warning. Nicole's lie may end the lawsuit which is further fragmenting the town, but the accident and its effects are not undone, neither in terms of narrative nor stylistically: as Nicole's voice-over insists, "we're all citizens of a different town now"; in *The Sweet Hereafter* the accident and its effects linger in a way that the closure of *Titanic* refuses.

Although *Titanic* dominated the Academy Awards for 1997, both in number of awards won and in terms of spectacle, suggesting a celebration of mainstream Hollywood pictures, *The Sweet Hereafter* was also a presence, albeit a slight one. The film's nominations for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Director meant that the film could participate in the proceedings, in however small a way. Of course, the film added little to the Oscar spectacle: Best Director nominees were shown in clips of themselves at work; and the screenplay nomination was accompanied by a brief silent clip alongside a photograph of the writer (Egoyan, in this case). Egoyan himself appeared on-camera, along with the other director nominees, for the few seconds between the nominee

announcements and the winner declaration. The film thus enjoyed minimal participation in the spectacle itself; but what of the film's inclusion among the nominees? If the 1997 Academy Awards signalled an unabashed celebration of Hollywood, what do we make of the presence of this small-budget Canadian film? The nominations attest to Egoyan's recognition by the screenwriting and directing members of the Academy, for, unlike the votes for the winners, nominations are voted on only by the members of that category, rather than the whole body of the Academy. But the effect of *The Sweet Hereafter's* nominations, as far as the Oscars are concerned, seems twofold: there is a kind of levelling that takes place between the Hollywood pictures and the art-house films that are nominated, especially considering the fact that *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter* were both nominated in the Best Director category; and the inclusion of art-house films likely adds to the Academy's credibility. If a Hollywood film wins over an art-house film, the validation of Hollywood increases.

The Sweet Hereafter may not have dominated the Oscars, but it did dominate, on its own home turf, at the Genie Awards, where the film won eight awards in December 1997. Despite such success, however, the forum of the Genies simply does not allow for the kind of extension of spectacle that *Titanic* enjoyed at the Oscars; indeed, even the difference in fashion of the guests is remarkable between Oscars and Genies. In contrast to the paradox of self-aggrandizement and solemnity displayed by James Cameron, self-consciousness and self-deprecation appear more of an aspect of the Genie winners' speeches. The winner of the Golden Reel award for 1997 was *Air Bud*, a movie about a basketball-playing golden retriever. In his Best Director speech, Atom Egoyan promised that "in the remake of *The Sweet Hereafter*, the dog from *Air Bud* will save the kids." Egoyan also referred to a need

for further spectacle of the Genies themselves, for the year *The Sweet Hereafter* won eight awards, the ceremonies were not broadcast live: accepting for Best Picture, Egoyan said, “I think it’s a good show; we should get it back on air.” The absence of live telecast in 1997 is emblematic of an absence of spectacle, regardless of the fact that the awards were broadcast on Bravo! the next day.

But in the aftermath of *The Sweet Hereafter*’s Oscar nominations, the film and the Genie Awards appear to have gained a greater degree of importance. The Oscar nominations have meant more, it seems, than the film’s success at Cannes, and much more than its success at the Genies. Critics have seized upon the film as a turning point for the English-Canadian film industry because of its Oscar nominations. *Shift* magazine declares, “Atom Egoyan’s Oscar nominations for *The Sweet Hereafter* and the recent merger of Alliance and Atlantis into a mega-studio are just two signs that Canadian film is coming into its own as both a sophisticated art form and a mature industry” (“Players” 34). Presumably, the “art form” invocation refers to the Oscar nominations, betraying a presupposition that the Academy functions as cultural monitor to legitimize films as art. Pevere claims, “It’s early yet, but surely the fact that this uncompromisingly cerebral and anti-sensational movie has become arguably the most celebrated Canadian film ever made will have an impact. Its Oscar nomination [*sic*] represents a symbolic global acknowledgment of the Canadian art-movie tradition” (“Classics” 48). Pevere appears to conflate the globe with America, for Egoyan also had success with *Exotica* at Cannes.

But if, as Pevere suggests, the world has embraced English-Canadian film, what has been the effect in Canada? Consider the fact that the Genies for 1998 and 1999 were broadcast live—the year after the Oscar nominations—broadcast, in fact, in February 1999

and late January 2000, much closer to the Academy Awards than in previous years.

Several presenters (e.g. Natasha Henstridge, Jill Hennessy, Mia Kirshner) at the Genies for 1998 were Canadians who have achieved success outside the country, namely in the United States. Catherine O'Hara and Deborah Kara Unger were part of the Genies spectacle for 1999: O'Hara won the Best Supporting Actress award; and Unger presented the film clips for Best Picture nominee (and winner) *Sunshine*, a film in which Unger herself acted.

These actresses present at the awards for 1998 and 1999 certainly do not constitute the "vaguely familiar Canadian faces" (Golfman 7) typically associated with the Genie Awards; significantly, they were the most lavishly dressed of anyone at the ceremonies, thereby setting a standard for glamour. That Atom Egoyan presented the award for Best Picture for 1998 also indicates two elements of Oscar-simulation at the Genies: it is often customary for the previous year's winners to present the equivalent of their award (often switching the gender, i.e. last year's Best Actress presents this year's Best Actor); therefore, Egoyan's win for Best Picture entitles him to present this year's award, just as John Greyson, director of the *Lilies*, winner of the 1996 award, presented Best Picture to Egoyan. At the Oscars, however, it is tradition that a seasoned Hollywood performer (usually male), someone who in some ways defines the industry, will present Best Picture (recent presenters have included Robert DeNiro, Sean Connery, and Harrison Ford). It appears as though Egoyan may have taken up this position in relation to the Canadian film industry because of the Oscar nominations, a distinction awarded outside the country. Similarly, at the Genies for 1999, the presenter of Best Picture was Denys Arcand (rather than François Girard, director of last year's Best Picture winner). Arcand is the director of the Oscar-nominated films *Le déclin de l'empire américain* and *Jésus de Montréal*. As

Pevere acknowledges, "it's early yet," but perhaps the last two Genie Awards presentations are a testament to shifting attitudes of Canadians towards films made in their country, or perhaps shifting attitudes of the Canadian film industry towards itself; this shift appears to have been effected by the Academy Awards' recognition of Canadian films.

What are the criteria filled by *The Sweet Hereafter* that have infused this film with such importance for the Canadian film industry? To begin with, as Pevere demonstrates with his analysis of death in Canadian cinema, it fits into the construction of Canadian film as a national cinema: clearly a place where *The Sweet Hereafter*, but not *Air Bud*, belongs. The external validation from Cannes, but more importantly from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in the United States, indicates to Canadians (and others) that the film has artistic merit. But, as the Oscar nominations (and the taste therein implied) suggest, the film is not *too* artistic: indeed, critics have repeatedly referred to *The Sweet Hereafter* as Egoyan's "most accessible [film] to date" (qtd. in Adams D1); certainly, *Family Viewing* would never be given a second look by AMPAS. But neither would most Canadians take a second look at many of Egoyan's early films. Egoyan's position in relation to the Canadian filmgoing public seems to resemble that of Wanda Otto and her photographs in *The Sweet Hereafter*. Dolores betrays almost a distrust of the photograph Bear has brought for the school bazaar, saying "Well, it's bizarre all right," to which Wanda replies, with terrible irony, that she "could wrap it up—protect the children." But Wanda's work does have a place in the community: a doubled photograph—Wanda's trademark—of Nicole hangs behind her on stage at the fair; and Risa Walker has one of Wanda's photographs at the motel. Egoyan's work, generally viewed as "bizarre" by the Canadian public, might now have taken up an important place in Canadian culture due to

its new-found accessibility. In fact, *The Sweet Hereafter*'s success has been questioned for its relation to the Canadian community as a whole. Egoyan writes of "[a] huge picture of [him] in *The Toronto Star* wearing an Olympic cap. The headline is 'Team Egoyan,' and the article is an analysis of whether or not the achievement of the double Oscar nomination is a triumph for Canada (like an Olympic victory), or just a triumph for [him] personally" ("Diary" 63).

Presumably, Canadians in general can triumph in *The Sweet Hereafter*'s nominations, and can be proud of the film precisely because of its Canadianness. Egoyan describes a screening of the film in Lake Placid as follows:

During the question period afterwards, someone asks why I didn't shoot the film in the Adirondacks [where Banks's novel was set]. I have to explain that it's a Canadian film, and therefore had to be shot in Canada. I've never seen someone so confused by such a simple response. ("Diary" 62)

Banks's novel is set in the fictional town of Sam Dent, New York. While most critics refer to the film's setting as Sam Dent, British Columbia, in her review of the film, Janet Maslin describes Sam Dent as "a tiny, once neighborly Adirondack town" ("Bereft" E13). Maslin thereby conflates the novel and film's setting, but is it an honest mistake? The film passes "the licence-plate test" (Fothergill, "Place" 353) by including British Columbia plates, and there are Canadian flags shown periodically: Abbott, Dolores's husband, has a Canadian flag on his shirt pocket; and Mason, Billy's son, has a Canadian flag on his snowsuit. Stanley Kauffman writes that "the move [of setting] doesn't matter" from the novel to the film, apart from the accents of the characters (30). James Adams writes of *The Sweet Hereafter* as an unapologetically Canadian film, complete with "a snowbound valley town"

and a love scene in which the character, Billy, “makes sure the television set is turned on to a hockey game before they roll on the bed” (D1). But there are no references in the film’s dialogue to location: characters invoke “the city” to indicate distinctions and distance from their town. While “the city” presumably would indicate Vancouver, given the B.C. setting, this assumption is not confirmed by the film.² American phrases appear in dialogue:

Dolores claims that Wanda and Hartley Otto have gone to “college,” not university; and Nicole gives the speed of the bus at “72 miles an hour,” rather than in kilometres. Granted, the Ottos could conceivably have gone to a community college, but in Banks’s novel, Dolores also says she believes the Ottos “were college educated” (14); whether the significance of “college” is meant to shift meaning along with the narrative’s setting is unclear. These discrepancies do not necessarily make *The Sweet Hereafter* any less of a “Canadian” film, but they point to a kind of placelessness that complicates what others have viewed as the film’s insistent Canadianness at the level of setting, and perhaps add another layer of “accessibility” to the film: not only are Egoyan’s characters emotionally accessible to the audience, but Canada has become accessible to international viewers through muted references to nation and place.³

Such negotiations of setting in *The Sweet Hereafter* are in some ways analogous to the other cultural negotiations between the Hollywood and Canadian film industries, as the intersections between *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Titanic* suggest. The differences between the two films in terms of representing a tragic accident seemingly indicate a distinction between Hollywood and Canadian filmmaking sensibilities, as well as larger cultural differences: the Hollywood film, and the Oscars which celebrate it, upholds the centrality of glamour and spectacle; the Canadian film, and the small scale of the Genies, participates

in a denial of spectacle while celebrating an art-house tradition. These declarations, however, are deeply problematic, especially considering *The Sweet Hereafter*'s Oscar nominations and the intersections between Hollywood and Canadian film that they represent. If production context makes a difference, the director's place of origin does not always appear to be a factor: it is difficult to insert James Cameron and Atom Egoyan "in the same box . . . stamped Made in Canada," at least as far as filmmaking traditions are concerned; as "celebrity interviewer Brian Linehan says it's a bogus gimmick to try to label the two men as different versions of Canadian-bred cinematic talent because they have nothing to do with each other" (McKay B4). But if we take into consideration that Atom Egoyan has been recognized by the same taste-makers as James Cameron, in however smaller a capacity, they must have something to do with each other, if only through these seemingly unlikely intersections as the Academy Award nominations. And if we identify Canadian cinema (in its incarnation as a national cinema) as one which is anti-commercial, how do we explain the presence of the Golden Reel award at the Genies, or the pride with which it was announced that *The Sweet Hereafter* is "the first English-language film supported by Telefilm Canada to make money in 12 years" (Everett-Green C2)? Likewise, before we distinguish American taste from Canadian taste, we must recall not only *The Sweet Hereafter*'s Oscar nominations, but also the fact that far more Canadians saw *Titanic* than Egoyan's Genie-winning film. However tempting it is to posit strict oppositions between Canadian and American culture, their points of intersection reveal aspects of interdependence. Canadian culture, in particular, is so bound up with American culture, it is often difficult to separate it. *Titanic* and *The Sweet Hereafter* display great differences between them, in terms of budget, spectacle, and narration; the points where they meet,

however, whether they be transportation accidents, or a few seconds of Oscar air-time where James Cameron and Atom Egoyan appear simultaneously onscreen, emphasize the films and the circulation of texts surrounding them as evidence of the fluctuating cultural borders.

Notes

1. In a 1992 review of Russell Banks's novel, *The Sweet Hereafter*, Jane Griesdorf writes that "[t]he genesis" of the novel "is a conflation of many recent calamities, one of which was an accident in Texas where a schoolbus descended into a quarry" (435).
2. Fothergill makes a similar observation about *Slipstream*, set in southern Alberta: "the nearest urban centre to Mallard's electronic hideaway is never called Lethbridge, but always 'the city', allowing viewers to think of it as Salt Lake or Oklahoma, as seems good to them" ("Place" 353).
3. My thanks to Larry McDonald for our discussion of these issues.

Conclusion

On March 21, 1998, just preceding the Oscars, *The Sweet Hereafter* won Best Foreign Film at the Independent Spirit Awards. Atom Egoyan, in his "Oscar diary" printed in *Maclean's*, writes of Norman Jewison introducing him to Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America: "Norman introduces me and says: 'Jack, Atom just won for best foreign film at the Spirit Awards. Get it, Jack? It's a foreign movie. Canada is a foreign country'" (64). Such a declaration on Jewison's part functions to criticize the notion of Canada as part of the U.S. domestic market and the idea that "it's the same culture, isn't it?" (64). But it also adds an interesting layer to the discourse of "foreignness" where Canada and the United States are concerned: if Jewison was denied competitive Academy Awards because of his nationality, he took this opportunity at the Independent Spirit Awards to celebrate this foreignness; further, he implies that such foreignness is not so much a containment of threat to Hollywood filmmaking, but rather an enabling category for Canadian cinema, one that allows it to assert its own identity. Clearly, "foreignness" at the Independent Spirit Awards signifies something different from the Oscars' presentation of the concept, as *The Sweet Hereafter* is not a foreign language film; nevertheless, Canada is recognized as "foreign," and this foreignness is part of the system of celebration at the Independent Spirit Awards.

This study's attempt to make "sense" of awards shows has underscored the fact that, not surprisingly, these awards and their spectacles of celebration often have little to do with the nominated and winning films; or at least, the films themselves are only the most obvious component of their systems. Awards categorize, assign positions, pass judgments, contribute to and initiate discourses surrounding cinema. They draw distinctions according

to taste, language, nation, and culture, and project constructions of the industries they uphold. And by putting on a show, they celebrate themselves in the process.

This celebration does not come easy in Canada, where a “‘felt’ national cultural absence has consisted of one part lost cultural potential, one part manifestos for corrective measures, and two parts self-loathing” (Acland 281). Moreover, celebration of Canadian culture has often depended upon the “reduc[tion] [of] the multifarious pleasures of U.S. cinema to a simplistic notion of ideological invasion” (282). The question of popularity becomes a key issue: whereas American film is immensely popular in Canada, “Canadian film culture is not a part of the popular cinema-going practices of Canadians” (282).

Charles Acland examines the cultural position of the Canadian film viewer as follows:

Though it offers a view to an exhilarating world movie culture, movie going essentially takes you away from your national home. A seat in a Canadian movie theatre is essentially a seat on international territory; it offers the experience of being ‘anywhere’ and of cosmopolitan connection to other world movie audiences. (283)

As Canadians are thus displaced from their own geography and culture in film consumption, there are “habitual ways in which Canadians make international culture their own” (287). This observation of the Canadian viewing position has affinities with the representation of place in *The Sweet Hereafter*: while Canadians “make international culture their own,” the film, by somewhat blurring its sense of place, makes Canada itself international, or at least internationally accessible. And, in turn, the film has become internationally celebrated. This negotiation of nation can also apply to James Cameron’s success, an example of “the presence of Canadian talent in the U.S. industry,” which

“offers a way for Canadian audiences to view the success of Canadian talent, to read a film as a mark of Canadian achievement” (Acland 286). To a certain extent, therefore, Hollywood products can often be read differently by Canadians, distinguishing Canadians from Americans at the level of viewership.

But for those concerned about Canadians having their own, recognizably Canadian culture, the “star-in-exile system” (Acland 286) of Canadians in Hollywood does not quite fit the bill; consequently, discourses of Canadian cinema have often taken on a nationalist urgency. As a cinema that has been financially supported by the state, Canadian film carries ideological implications: “Policies of national culture are ideological attempts to bring certain visions of nation and citizenship into existence” (288). As Andrew Higson acknowledges, “the state intervenes only when there is a felt fear of the potential power of a foreign cinema, and particularly when the products—and therefore the ideologies and values—of a foreign cinema are widely circulated within a nation state” (43). In response to this foreign threat (Hollywood, in Canada’s case),

Proclamations of national cinema are thus in part one form of “internal cultural colonialism”: it is, of course, the function of institutions—and in this case national cinemas—to pull together diverse and contradictory discourses, to articulate a contradictory unity, to play a part in the hegemonic process of achieving consensus, and containing difference and contradiction. (44)

Just as Hollywood and the Academy Awards function hegemonically, Canadian cinema is involved in a hegemonic project of its own. The difference appears to be that Hollywood is far more successful at achieving consent than Canadian film.¹ This disparity is not

surprising, for while dissent certainly exists in American society, Canada's larger national identity is fraught with crises and failed attempts to win consent.

At the level of cinema, consent can be tied to popularity. Higson argues "that for a cinema to be nationally popular it must also be international in scope. That is to say, it must achieve the international (Hollywood) standard" (40). Surely, the adjustments made to the Genie Awards following the international reception (namely, the Academy Award nominations) of *The Sweet Hereafter* correspond to this dynamic. CBC television's advertising slogan for the Genie Awards for 1999, "See why the rest of the world is excited about Canadian movies," speaks to Canadian cinema's dependence upon external validation to attract the attention of the Canadian public. But even with its international recognitions, *The Sweet Hereafter* poses no threat to the popularity of a film such as *Titanic*. The two films competed against each other at the Academy Awards, testifying to a co-existence as well as an interdependence of Canadian and Hollywood film culture. Ironically, it seems that the ideological project of Canadian national cinema, as manifest in *The Sweet Hereafter*, culminates in American celebration of Canadian culture, or a categorization of the two together. While the Academy Awards are rooted in a different tradition of taste than that of the national cinema conception of Canadian film, the two clearly intersect, in practice if not in theory. And although the Oscars and Genies perform different functions as far as their celebrations of cinema are concerned, they display similar characteristics when it comes to nation: the Genies promote Canada to Canadians; the Oscars promote America to itself and to the world. Their differences lie in their manner of promotion and their success in fulfilling these projects.

Important questions remain: how enabling is a concept of “foreignness” to Canadian culture, and is it not complicit with the marginalization of Canadian culture within Canada? If “Art House movies require a more sophisticated set of competencies than the mainstream Hollywood product” (Blewitt 368), can a Canadian cinema that presents itself to Canadians as an exclusive art cinema successfully perform the function of forging a national culture? Are the issues of Canadian cinema too dependent upon taste to enter into questions of nation? And is the fusion of class and national interests, where taste is concerned, ultimately counterproductive? The issue is not whether Canadian cinema is worthy of celebration (which is entirely beside the point), but whether such celebrations can perform the roles they designate for themselves. One reason behind the Academy Awards’ success is that they have no trouble finding an audience. Hence, the debate about Canadian cinema and celebration is a circular one, for the films need to be seen in order for the Genies to accrue any significance, and the films need to be distributed and exhibited in order to be seen by a larger percentage of the public. Whether it will take several more Egoyan-type recognitions of Canadian films at the Academy Awards for the Genies to find an audience remains to be seen. Similarly, awards shows themselves will continue to adapt to the concerns of the industries they support, and their significations will also shift accordingly. What is bound to remain constant are the use of awards as articulations of taste and constructions of cinema and the industries that produce it.

Notes

1. The programming of the Genie Awards for 1999 against the Superbowl, “stereotypically American mass entertainment” (Lacey, “Dream” R1), illustrates a lopsided comparison of the success of popular cultural projects: “It’s a metaphor for making films in Canada really. It’s the Superbowl every day” (qtd. R1).

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