

GUY MADDIN

FROM THE
ATELIER TOVAR:
SELECTED WRITINGS



JOURNAL ONE
(1987 – 1998)



Dream List for Dave Barber:

- **Greed*, Erich von Stroheim
- **The Old Dark House* (1932), Dir. James Whale w. Karloff, Melyvn Douglas, Charles Laughton
- **Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, (1932), Dir. Rouben Mamoulian w. F. March, M. Hopkins
- **The King of Jazz* (1930), w. Paul Whiteman
- **Broadway Melody* (1929)
- **Scarlet Empress*, von Sternberg
- **Dames*, Busby Berkeley
- **The Merry Widow* (1934), Ernst Lubitsch, MGM
- Mad Love* (1935), Dir. Karl Freund w. Peter Lorre
- **Little Match Girl*, Jean Renoir
- **The Devil's Cleavage*, George Kuchar
- **Fireworks*, Kenneth Anger
- *Any *Popeye* cartoons from the 1930s
- Pather Panchali*, Dir. Satyajit Ray
- Bizarre, Bizarre [Drôle de Drame]* (1937), Dir. Marcel Carné
- Blessed Event* (1932), Lee Tracy; Dick Powell
- The Canary Murder Case* (1929), Louise Brooks, William Powell
- **Umberto D., The Children Are Watching Us* (1942), Vittorio De Sica
- Cleo from 5 to 7*, Agnès Varda
- Day Dreams* (23 min, 1928), Dir. Ivor Montagu
- A Day in the Country* (1937), Jean Renoir
- Day of Wrath* (1943), Carl Dreyer
- **The Devil Doll* (1936), Dir. Tod Browning
- Fashions of 1934*, Dir. William Dieterle, Bette Davis; William Powell
- Crime of M. Lange*, Dir. Renoir
- The Greeks Had a Word for Them* (1932)
- Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* (1933), Al Jolson, Rogers & Hart
- Berlin, Symphony of a City*
- If You Could Only Cook* (1938)
- The Italian Straw Hat*
- Le Jour se lève* (M. Carné) Arletty; Gabin
- Laughter*

27 November 1987



ave to move Mom out of the house – the only home our family has ever known – tomorrow morning at eight. Last night I had the first of what I presume will be many haunting dreams concerning the shop – or whatever it is I should call it now that I write about it for the first time, ironically, upon the eve of a moment after which I shall always have to refer to it in the past tense. In the dream I discover a new room in the basement, a room which has been there all along but which I have been too unobservant to notice. A nice long bowling lane of a room with an equally long storage area clumsily grafted overtop of the concrete entrance and stairway. There is a secret panel entrance but also a door, obviously located, it turns out, beside the other, always-used door, with a window in it as well, which has led into the basement area for years. Should read that Agee/Evans book to see if lengthy descriptions of home interiors are readable even in the prose of a brilliant writer before I waste any of my little spent effort on this passage.

28 December

Just tucked Jilian in after *Anne of Green Gables* at Playhouse Theatre. Watched a special 1962 *Untouchables* episode starring Barbara Stanwyck and Ed Asner as police officers helping Ness and in the process taking over the show ...

Since I last wrote in here too much has happened. I am lonely – a little – but I think it is good for me. It has been a long time since I was lonely. This period will allow me to overhaul my soul, throw together some genuine qualities and eventually dispel all loneliness with a bang.

I've even considered working for a charity. Other things to do: paint a picture of Cousin's interior in Jilian's acrylics. Hand tint that photo of Tiffany perhaps.

I slept for over two hours Xmas afternoon. My nerves completely shot. Twenty-four hours with Amma wound up tight by her organizational urges, all of us grating to each other, blasting even the dimmest recollections of the season's traditions to oblivion. Xmas Eve in a seniors' home; four p.m. dinner lasting seven minutes; all the presents ripped open in a piranha frenzy by kids who will never know the torture of waiting.

All this leaving me exceptionally irritable. Klymkiw told me a great story about his family at Xmas. He must be near the breaking point.

I had a good day with Jilian today. But I did spank her for the first time in perhaps two years. I think we understand each other more as a result ... that's a phrase. She's a very sensitive, feeling little girl who makes me very proud of her character, but I've allowed her access to my weakness, and we dislike ourselves when this access is negotiated. These are quite the phrases too. Strictness makes for happy pups. We both feel better now.

28 December 1995

Careful plays on cinema's 100th birthday, in Paris, the city of its birth. Merci, E.D. Distribution. (Just a press screening, but a projector in Paris played it all on this holy day!)

2 January 1996

One hour with hockey at Steen. My delight. One hundred more pages of *Hugo*. Tomorrow I finish that and commence another draft of *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. Elise watched *Long Day's Journey into Night* this afternoon. At dinner, we rewatched *All About Eve*. George has a flu for the first time in his life. He and I discussed W. Herzog and Ross McMillan as Dr. Solti. Ritchard Findlay wants Tim Roth for Glahn in *Twilight* – a horrible actor and fortunately out of our league.

3 January

Susan Minas at Alliance has suggested my name to the Cowboy Junkies for rock video work. Now I know where you go after you die. It is painful for artists in hard times, dead artists, artists no one wants, but in Canada we are put on life-support systems. No one lets us go to the grave. We walk the earth after midnight, howling. Won't someone just drive stakes through us?

5 January

Spent entire day working on *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* script revisions, to be sent to Keith Griffiths, but not in the streamlined form I promised him; instead I sent an all-new enriched purple edition. I now have a stack of books to read in between production designing and skating (which Rob Shaver agreed was unwise

to do in -28° and 2200 windchill, a warning which suited little responsible me fine.) My book stack: Swinburne's poems; Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Savinio's *The Lives of the Gods*; Chateaubriand's *Atala and Rene*; LaForgue's *Moral Tales*; Sachey Sitwell's *Splendours and Miseries*; and Beardsley's *Under the Hill*.

14 January, 11:55 p.m.

Glahn – (#1) Kyle McCulloch, Aden Young, Brendan Fraser?,
rock star of some sort?

Solti – Maury Chaykin, Werner Herzog, (#1) Christopher Lee,
John Neville, Armin Mueller-Stahl, John Colicos, Jan Rubes

Cain Ball – Jim Keller (deceased), Maury Chaykin, (#1) John Neville
Juliana – (#1) Julie Delpy, Mia Kirshner, someone from
Rozema's pic

Zephyr – (#1) Alice Krige, Mitsou, Lena Olin, Sadie Frost,
Katy Gardner

Amelia – (#1) Samantha Eggars, Deborah Harry, Jackie Burroughs,
Diana Rigg

Please, Guy, make yourself watch *Whale Music* for the two leads.
Steal set designs from Max Ophuls's *Le Plaisir*!

15 January

Dubbed *Le Plaisir*. Watched *Vertigo* and *Daughter of Horror* (1955). Browsed through Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*. Strongly considering showing up absent for my director-observer stint on *My Life as a Dog* – the TV series. Skate not yet fixed. There seems to be absolutely no progress since I got three producers for *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* a month and more ago. Six weeks! Everyone can just fuck off, fuck off, fuck off! Oh boy! They sure can help, these producers. Seventy thousand dollars each and they have other jobs, paper routes for all I know! They are fucking with me. They wank with their office overhead and they fuck with me. And there hasn't been a movie made in this country yet that doesn't stink more than a dogturd! (Except *Léolo*, which stinks of excrement in unsurpassably brilliant ways.) Have another Jaguar, boys. Good night.

26 March

Have made a Gatsby list which is far too crushing a confession

even for these pages. Having turned forty recently, I may as well arbitrarily choose now as the time to assess my life: at least thirty-five years wasted, if not more. If I could pull a few productive months, or even a year, out of the remainder of my days, I think I shall shit my pants from astonishment. My Gatsby list identified the usual trouble spots, but I'm realistic about the love handles. If I can generate a handful of genuine smiles on somebody's face without ventilating my head, my list will have done its job. I want to talk about my list, but I'm afeared it probably looks the table of contents from any self-help book at Coles. At least this much is obvious: major blocks of my life-array need to be shifted, reversed, restacked, mulched. I know what needs to be done, and where; all I have to do is do it!

29 March

Just finished a phone conversation with a Kristin Lehman, actress. Seems very nice. Wouldn't it be nice if she just fit Juliana fine, then we could proceed with some ostriches, a studio and two actresses locked. At 4:30 I coffee with R. H. Thomson, distinguished star of *Avonlea*. There is a blizzard piling slush onto already six-foot-high snowbanks, and I'm wading through this shit to hobnob with Canada's TV elite. Is that where this gooseflesh has come from?

Okay, here on the very next page is the Gatsby list of what's wrong with Gatsby. All my diary false starts seem to have naked confessions similar to this. I need the whole page, I think.

Gatsby List

1. Lonely
2. Physically unfit
3. Unreliable
4. Chronically depressed
5. Spinelessly incapable of refusing to perform unpleasant favours
6. Don't read enough
7. Don't have very many real friends
8. Don't really have many fake friends
9. Never create genuine laughter or happiness in others
10. Complain about others too much

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11. Never busy enough
12. Have no financial security long- or short-term
13. Write letters too infrequently
14. Am simply not living my life (to be continued)
15. Don't write diary entries regularly
16. Don't write enough
17. Crummy son, father, husband

Shaping up ...

Peter Glahn: Aden Young

Zephyr: Alice Krige

Dr. Solti: R. H. Thomson; Chris Lee

Cain Ball: Tom Waits

Juliana: Kristin Lehman

Amelia: Mary Walsh

Things to Do in Response to Gatsby List

1. Work hard, be thoughtful, generate activity; loneliness should disappear.
2. Eat properly, cycle, walk.
3. Be adult about responsibilities; donate \$1000 to Wpg. Film Group.
4. If I address all the other points, perhaps depression will disappear.
5. You know what to do.
6. Read more.
- 7 & 8. You've worn out your personal mythologies. There are other people who might be interesting who didn't happen to spend 'L'Age d'or' with you.
- 9 & 10. Take that hornet's nest out of your butt.
 11. When you find a couch growing out of your side, take note. If paralyzed with ennui, you can always scrawl something in this therapeutic journal-thing. Use still or video camera more.
 12. Perhaps it would be nice to live above month-to-month anchorite levels of subsistence. You must learn to be more thick-skinned about the film business and treat it as a source of income. Work harder to wedge other jobs into long stretches of downtime. Write for a magazine. Keep an eye open for a regular job. Pay income tax near

deadline when possible. Purchase RRSPs next year. Buy Blue Bombers season's tickets? Ah, yes, let's buy: a fax, a turntable, an audio-cassette recorder with jacks. Start a savings plan if the movie goes. Ask Alan for portfolio advice. Let's get some savings already.

13. Write and fax and phone people more. For friends and connections.
14. GET OUT – LIVE – WORK!
- 15 & 16. Write more
18. Be better.

It's still March 29, my father's 78th birthday, I just realized. Man, I still love that guy, dead nineteen years. Cameron had been gone fourteen years when Chas bought it. How did Dad ever get over that feeling? And all of his tears came out of one eye.

7 April

Yesterday, drove to Gimli at eight a.m. to fetch reeds and rushes for set dressing. Snow drifts were gigantic; whiteness everywhere made the sun oppressive. Had imperial cookies, some of which I fed to a squirrel in our front yard at 22 Lake, where I also planted seed in the sunny windswept Arctic diorama that spread out around our promontory of a breakwater. Brief magic, then back to the city, where I completed a first draft of the sets for *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. I ran into Ritchard at Zines; he had come down from the premiere of *My Life as a Dog*. He said it was quite good; he made absolutely no qualification. I'm sorry, even Derek Mazur, whom I now respect as a result, has stated the qualifications inherent in the very nature of the project. Ritchard and I will never understand each other at any level. He is alternately respectful and jealous of the press attention I have received, and he does not like my movies. To a lesser degree, this may be a problem with another, infinitely smarter man, DOP Mike Marshall. If these people, Telefilm, Alliance, etc., had simply listened to me when I tried to explain how I took a shortcut to my modest position in the film world, how I entered the industry through the back door, as a novelty act without a ticket, how I was quite clever in doing so and owed my very presence there to peculiar trickery, then these people would not be so

quick to remove all these tricks from my bag: my Vaseline, scratches, monochromes and tableaux, all my mannered dialogues and feigned magic-lantern innocence. Now they want to make me pass muster at the front door, where I must check my bag. I now have a single free pass into a feature project, but I shall shortly be given a bum's rush when what I have to show for myself proves no better than what any gate-crashing imposter could come up with when put on the spot by so many black ties. I'm simply not good enough to play by the same rules as the established drones, so I shall fall short of them on their terms, and these are dull and loathsome talents to be shown up by. Had we discussed my strengths and my weaknesses, had we all agreed upon which we would avoid and which to face head-on, there would be an understanding sense of solidarity among my producers and me rather than an ever-renewing sense of stupidity and insensitivity all around.

Anyway, after I designed the sets, Ritchard started ordering me to include certain shots in the film – something which I by now consider insolent. He has totally betrayed the original spirit of our working agreement: that he be a totally subservient producer to my auteur. At times, I have no strength for the endless tug-of-war with this man who is either a self-serving Machiavelli or an amnesiac. He's gadget crazy, and if I don't fight this process-o-phile, the product will be as embarrassing as *The Hands of Ida* – and the end of my career. I don't have the strength at the moment. Ritchard's latest dullard hubris has me longing for the grave.

10 April

Ritchard is intractable. He will pay all six actors the same rate – \$500/day. That means Alice Krige will be offered \$7000. Tom Waits and R. H. Thomson will be lured with \$4500 and the chance to work in the exotic locale of Winnipeg. Mary Walsh will earn \$10,000, more than our three prize catches mentioned above. Aden Young, or Aidan Quinn as Ritchard calls him, will fly up from Australia to earn \$10,000 in a month. After all these actors turn us down, we shall be turned down again by Pascale Bussi eres, Christopher Lee, and I don't know who. Why have we been talking about signing these people all along if there has never been any chance of signing any of them? Months ago, when

Ritchard told me the acting budget was set at \$50,000, I told him to add a decimal place. He promptly lowered the budget to \$44,000. I've talked to him twice since on the subject, once at great length. He says he is very persuasive, that actors will be convinced, that he will make an offer, then remain silent; that whoever talks first loses; that he learned this strategy during his days as a car salesman. It now appears that the movie will not go, or at least not on schedule, and not with the cast I want. It will be peopled with nauseating Canadians and other regular folk. How decadent.

I write these words at Zines, where I have run into my wife sitting with a book. Amma told me today that she will give me \$10,000 of her inheritance – Janet and Ross getting the same. A fantastic gift – if only I could think of how to use that money to get another profession. I feel, with Jupiter's gravity, that my movie and my life are sinking together into a noxious, gaseous fuck-blah. Buck up, Gatsby! Buck up!

3 September

The picture-cut is virtually complete. I shall now travel to Toronto to discuss a 1998 job directing an opera. Should I wear black?

A semi-fine cut of *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* awaits George in his mailbox. He will watch it tonight after his *Miss Julie* rehearsal. I pray he is as understanding as he can be. I know I dropped the ball with his script; I always did feel disembodied from this project. I don't know why. The story is very good, but I couldn't ever decide on a schema for the thing. And as I write this, my fingers still prance the Ouija board in search of one. Kyle McCulloch's voice could lock a schema in place like a bottle cap!

I have not had the energy to be angry at Ritchard for at least two weeks. How blissful this peace brought on by exhaustion is.

6 December

I got a \$20,000 Manitoba Arts Council grant to make a short film called *Maldoror: Tygers*. After twenty-six days of ADR (there were twenty-six shooting days), I now have more time for fun stuff. As I write these words, I am very happy. Will this downtime first steer me back into the depression that fills these pages? I am really only sad on the days I have time to write in here ...

1 September, 1997

Steve and I toss a soft bladder around Gladstone for twenty minutes. This is my third consecutive day of catch football. I'm slowly coming back. Now I must prep for the Toronto festival: my *Devil Doll* presentation, *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* and symposium speaking engagements. The crepe for Lauzon is being taken down; Princess Di's is going up. I think my movie is playing opposite Di's funeral – tough competition.

Lessons learned from shooting The Cock Crew:

- ❖ Have a firm hierarchy in place.
- ❖ Be fully prepared (FULLY) beforehand.
- ❖ Have one administrator responsible for budgets and schedules.
- ❖ Never allow employees to moonlight. Film is full-time. Jane Tingley's grass-cutting job left her completely useless to me, even though she's a great sculptor.
- ❖ To avoid territorial squirmishes, never allow construction and props-making at same site.
- ❖ Have a foreman.
- ❖ Always have a houseboy, high tea, wine, etc.
- ❖ Have lieder sung.
- ❖ Never hire useless friends.
- ❖ Make an aesthetic checklist and run it through frequently.

4 September

Off to Toronto Film Fest tonight. Carl, Steve and I swam this afternoon. I feel great.

I shall miss my bike when I'm away. Of all things this summer that could have been, it turned out to be the time I fell in love with my bike. It's so old (sixty-seven years?) and so ugly that only old hippies pay it any mind. Blue, double-barred, double-handlebarred, saddled with a rusty jagged old metal seat that will someday sever that inner thigh artery which is never more than thirty seconds away from pouring out your life. This bike has never been oiled. As a consequence, the simple act of pedalling it is like moving a pyramid block on sand. Three years ago, a pedal poorly welded into place by my Uncle Lawrence dropped off while I was really pumping, and sent me sprawling onto the street in front of the Zoo, where I once found two pair

of dentures in the dust. I cried when no one came to help me. I broke my shoulder. Now I ride this two-wheeler miles a day ...

14 September

On AC 193 to Winnipeg. Fest. est mort!

Most surreal moment: Gordon Pinsent emerging from crowd at Saturday's closing party to greet me and encourage me. Arm extended: 'Guy Maddin.' My arm extended: 'Mr. Pinsent.' We speak of MTC, John Hirsch, Len Cariou; we look awkwardly about, shake hands again. Farewell and back into the crowd for the rowdyman.

Pinsent's schmoozing has worked. There must be a part for this fellow in *Nemo Electric*. *The Pumps of Edison*. *The Edison Orgy*. *Dad's Muscle*. What to call it!!

A salon at Laura's last night. Tara Ellis and Irish beau Andrew (a *Globe* financial page writer), David McIntosh, Nora Young, Rick and Val Gilbert, Noam Gonick and, sitting at my right with likely boredom, my beloved Jilian. Very wonderful to sit with her beneath the ripening grapes which rained down from the trellis.

On Friday, Bruce LaBruce book launch at Sneakers. Karen Freidman ('Tell Carl I should have called him, but I didn't') looking great, Gariné looking greater, little brother Torossian looking best.

I've been voted Miss Congeniality and given the Prompt Guest Award by Alliance office. Wonderful people. A twenty-minute conversation with Tony Cianciotta, a five-minute chance encounter with Claudia Lewis and a thirty-minute lunch with Charlotte Mickie survive as my most happy confabs.

Devil Doll intro went well. Three-hundred-seat sell-out. *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* 'intro' I attempt to hypnotize the audience – goes well enough. Six-hundred-seat sell-out one day then a call for deciduous melodrama the next day in front of a three-hundred-seat sell-out. This was OK.

18 September

Steve is writing about Steve the Barber, his bald coiffurist who hates men with hair. Steve wriggles his pen, clenching his fingers into the barber's fists. He writes of the head rubs, the

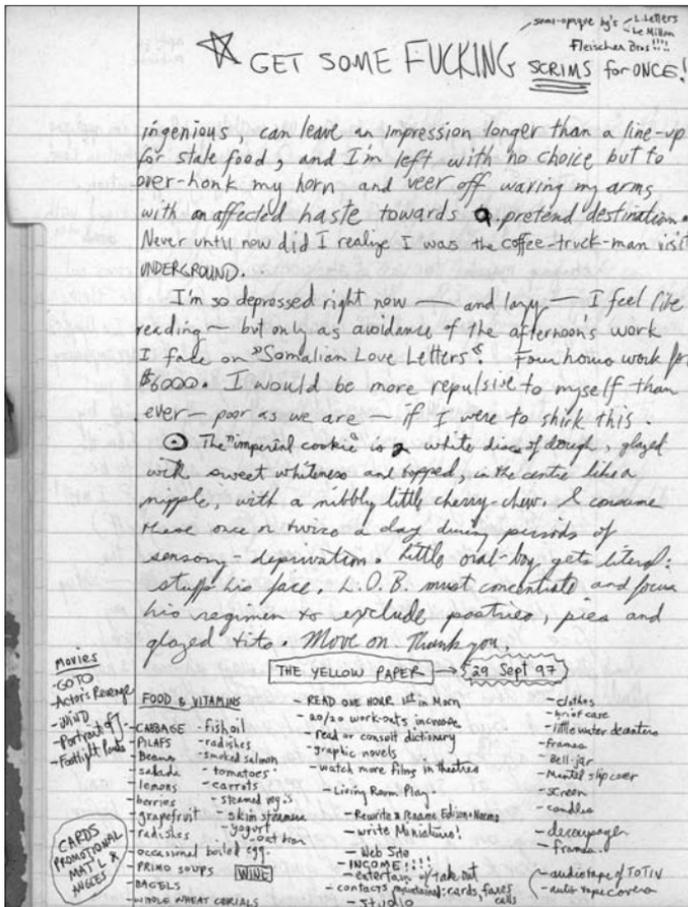
backcombing, the angry hair yanks and scissor snags, the punchings, all of these dealt to the scalps of customers luckier in the follicle dept. Steve the Barber has worked at Grosvenor and Stafford for forty-seven years. It took Steve the Customer that long to find his way into that brutal sadist's chair. Steve the Writer doesn't even seem to have gotten a single hair trimmed. He has simply squared off with an older, angrier Steve, put himself under his fingers. A full-Steve from the barber. And the customer, teeth clenching and face contorting with a full-Steve of his own, could be popped like an angry grape.

19 September

Dykemaster's Daughter storyboards to go into *Border Crossings*. I must lure Roger Frappier into range for a closer look-see. To the lake! To the lake! I've been looking forward to this for months. But this weekend looks fairly sterile for companionship. I need wine, a paint box, a pain box, a book, a blanket and a chilly swim. The flesh tightens in the cold water. A housecoat, a thermos of coffee, frozen grass, a lake so cold it scalds, stubble-smoke gauzing the promontories into *Le Million* backdrops, a chilly stone retrieved from congealed off-season shore muck. My heart breaks. This is the only possible cure for post-festival letdown. Why is there a letdown when one spends the entire festival, eleven days of it, turning one's soul inside out, scraping it all of its orientation by talking about it to paid interviewers, babbling the last bit of humanity from one's bosom at parties, and rinsing off all self-worth with cataracts of alcohol. The festival guest craves the terra firma of home, and once home for refilling, finds nothing here to put in his tanks. Swimming is all I'm capable of doing. Work of any sort is an impossibility. All my friends are wonderful, but someone is missing. Someone limned out vaguely from the fragmentary contours of many others who criss-crossed my stupefied gaze over the last week.

29 September

Caelum is applying to the Manitoba Arts Council for help on his *Guess Who* anthology. I too am applying, in direct competition with him for the October 1 deadline: *Somalian Love Letters* will exist in six-page précis for jury appreciation. I must pull myself out of the fiscal quicksand, thickened with recent bad



movie notices and final creditor notices, while clanging marital toxins of the schizoid variety drown out my cries for help. No review is entirely favourable these days — I expected this for *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* so the quicksand should have been avoidable — but the accompanying photos of me have solved once-and-for-painfully-all just why I had the Miss Congeniality award thrust on me by the pitying Alliance publicists. Also, the stills from the movie, even in faxed newsprint form, appear to be ghastly and poorly lit. Must I do everything? Evidently I must, even though I've proven myself (even to myself) an incompetent. The 'puff pieces' have missed the point, the pans

have missed the point – still sinking me like an old U-Boat on a few scores – and my face leers out like a Gwynplaine or a Jessel.

GET SOME FUCKING *SCRIMS FOR ONCE!!*

I'm so depressed right now – and lazy. I feel like reading, but only as avoidance of the afternoon's work I face on *Somalian Love Letters*. Four hours' work for \$6000. I would be more repulsive than ever – poor as we are – if I were to shirk this.

John Harkness called *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* 'the kind of really bad film that only a good filmmaker can make.' This represents the closest thing to a 'pull quote' I can get from the Toronto press this time around.

10 October

Peculiar sleeps in Paris. Must have seven naps and shits a day. My window is open with the Relais du Louvre flag sometimes flapping right into the room. Euro MTV on every waking minute. Finished Th. Metzger's *Blood and Volts* yesterday. Read the magnificent Brothers Quay script *The Mechanical Infanta* today. Within a minute spoke with a Quay (Stephen, I think) about the greatness of their piece. Expressed, also, since he would listen, my strong wish to have the Belgian Housegirl come to Olympia. Perhaps Ms. Krige would come, too? No shortage of lovely scenery in Seattle's Transcona.

Passed up trip to Maison de Victor Hugo in favour of viewing of Mitch Leisen's *Midnight* at Videothèque. Now, it's 18:40 and I must pace the streets of Paris to think of a translatable intro to *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. Can I recycle my attempted hypnosis of Toronto?

12 October

Wilfred's Day. Bought 1908 name-day calendar at Paris market. Should be usable for 1998. Every one of my movies played in Paris today, and I did Question and Answer for every single one. A few people saw them all, including one insane woman from a Far Side cartoon. Did a pretty good interview with Jedrek, a Pole, and his French friend, who pleased me by comparing my stuff to Jules LaForgue, whose *Moral Tales* are with me now whenever I shoot. I got to explain my *mélodrame caduc*, or

deciduous melodrama, theory: the overly methodical suitor so lacks spontaneity, is so rooted to one spot, that by the time inspiration comes to him, his gesture is so inappropriately overcharged that he loudly and bark-splittingly breaks apart and all dignity falls like leaves, stripping him to public nakedness, whatever. Caduc! Hugged and kissed Manu and Fabrice. Wake-up at 5:45 a.m. Breakfast vaguely planned with Lucius Barre. Goodnight.

13 October

Iberia flight 4425 to Barcelona. Need Spanish/English dictionary.

Perhaps my *Dead Father* negative is at the John Turner Archive in Ottawa? And perhaps Patrick Crowe can get me thousands of \$ for the junk I keep in Steve's attic. I need money very badly. Can get it by:

- ❖ selling archives
- ❖ getting movie going
- ❖ writing diary for someone else's film
- ❖ getting job (reg)
- ❖ getting job (directing TV and/or rock video)

Mused today about turning Neemo the son of Edison into Neemo the daughter. Much is gained and lost. I'm so at sea with narrative. My head swims, and George would kill me for even thinking about the script changes that pass, like taboo thoughts, into my consideration. Make a list.

14 October

Most wonderful little noises in the world are the ones made, mostly without change in nineteen years, by Jilian as she sleeps – which she did in my hotel room in Sitges last night.

We strolled the Mediterranean beaches for a couple of hours before bed – wonderful moon and surf – before an incipient cold gave a weird tincture to my dreams: I had to sneak one of my mother's young lovers out of Aunt Lil's bathroom, where he had post-coitally showered, and past Lil in her favourite chair, and also past Gramma – who had conveniently retired to her bedroom. (Amma decided to keep Gramma busy there by taking her knitting in to do at her mother's bedside.) But the

naked paramour emerged, all damp and clean, not from Lil's bathroom, but from the basement, up the very stairs that killed Gramma. He walked through the kitchen right at Lil – it dawned on me I could introduce him to Lil as a friend of Janet's husband – but he made a sudden left and, toothpick in mouth above steamed and soapy neck, departed through Lil's back door, just as Lil herself did on her fatal ambulance ride to Grace Hospital.



15 October

The wallet photo of 'Chas at Saltaire' is propped up in a little sand boat rendered by Jilian on the beach in the Mediterranean salt air. Dad could never have thought, while posing some fifty years ago with British Columbian tree saw and cigarette, that this very pose would be repeated by him (exactly, down to the length of the smoke and the degree of breezy freshness buffeting his young glass eye) on a beach in Sitges, Spain, twenty years after his death. Jil, who never met Dad, sleeps next to him in the sunny sand. The same waves that carried Homer, Ovid and Jason roll up with the same music they've always played. I lie in the shade of an ancient cave.

16 October

11:10 p.m. Sitting on our balcony overlooking the sea. The moon is not out yet, but a single bat circles above our courtyard, passes in front of the huge white wall of the hotel making himself nature-show visible, then sweeps, squeaking slightly I think, past my face. Jil pointed out this bat to me. I've always wanted to see one properly. We keep our door open nights here for vampires. As fathers will, I show off for my daughter by attempting to jam the bat's sonar with a loud fart, which echoes throughout the courtyard, off the pool, off all the balconies – my own sonar. A partially concealed female head in a room across the way pivots in puzzlement or disgust.

18 October

Martin Sheen looks out at the moonlit Mediterranean from his balcony just one bat sweep away – his profile as unmistakable as his voice. A drunken, crickety, pulchritudinous night. Sitges! Vene! Vale!

22 October (4:15 a.m.)

Ian has earned my undying love by nailing backs, or fourth sides, to various archways and flats which comprise the unpainted walls of my sets. He's done this in the same sloppy way that my father built fences, but the effect is amazing: everything takes on weight, the third dimension of things is real, the cheese quotient for the decors has been reduced to zero. I'm thrilled.

On Monday morning, I walked down to the seaside for the last time, very grey, hazy but warm. Opened up an *Interview* magazine I grabbed from the deserted lobby and while standing in the sand, found a photo of a topless Uma Thurman sitting on an identical beach. Then I jumped into the warm, churned water, surfed on two or three waves, walked back to the hotel and flew home to Winnipeg, arriving twenty-two hours later to an ice-encrusted city. Beautiful, leaf-naked and tiresomely slippery – fifteen-car crash on St. James Bridge, and muscles never before used strained horribly simply by walking on such a thinly-glazed surface. Defecated a week's worth of *carne*, went swimming – six-month pass purchased – watched *Ambersons*, ate Goldeye, tuned in the first inning of World Series, then went to sleep in deep depression at 7:30 p.m. after a typical exchange of childish sulking fits with my wife.

24 October

Teva and Holly meet me at Seattle airport. They have three boughs of lilies, very reproductive things, for me and the Quays. Already I forget what happened after: dinner with tons of wine before *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* screening. The evening goes on in raging cataracts (again) of Chardonnay until, time flowing well past 10:00 a.m. GMT, the Quays having watched my doc and my feature, everyone, Noam and Aubrey, Gariné, Timothy, Stephen, Holly, Teva and others either pair off or don't pair off in at least half the possible permutations. At least one monstrously unnatural act is performed. Next morning, many throbbing hangovers accompany us on a search for the horny and rotten salmon, said to be still running by Steamboat Island. We stare into the murky pools of water at the languid, bruised and flaccid fish – or are those our reflections? We reek of roe.

A seminar with REM video director Bangs, Quays, Noam and me. Packed, attentive, keen, American (!), college students. Noam teaches me the meaning of ephebophilia! Godzilla. Hormones and hangovers.

27 October

Scarecrow Video in Seattle, where I see a Japanese VHS of *Archangel*, which I autograph for the store. Always feels like a sad joke on myself to autograph such things. George and I once found an autographed collection of poems by Irving Layton in the ten-cent bin at the bookmart. We left it there.

Each of Holly and Heather has an older brother with Tourette's. Noam pronounces to a packed dining room that he can't stand heterosexual porn because it's full of women having sex. Cynthia Plaster Caster sits next to Stephen two seats down. Aubrey wears hairpins to present a birthday gift coiffure to the public – his hair is a series of blonde curling ribbons. Benjamenta or Noam removed all the pins and his hair unfolded into ancient Greek horns, like eagle tufts, to go with his eagle's beak and ephebishly ivory skin – a perfect Pan!

Every girl in Olympia has a pierced navel. Oh Sarah. Year of Sarahs. Two girlies say they will do anything to work with me. A Tokyo emigré named Kent gives me Timothy Brock soundtrack CDs (*Caligari* and *Faust*; the latter I trade with Stephen for Brock's *Sunrise*). The Quays, it turns out, have no

French distribution. Must phone (fax) E.D. Sarah walked out halfway through *Archangel* and never came back; was never seen again. The Quay movies are better and better each time out. Kahla the Dansk Croat makes cool art, paper-tissue lamps in 3D bear shapes, looks great/is funny.

When I get off this plane, I am to be kinder to Elise. We are to 'do things for one another.' I'm tired, and I'm sure she's resentful of the housework this agreement has compelled her to do just prior to my return. Should be a loving and wonderful reunion.

Teva gives the Quays *Judging Dairy Cows*, a photo-filled book featuring close-ups of cow rear ends, with tails held in nine and three o'clock positions by cropped-off farmers. Timothy finds a fantastic armless adolescent girl doll at Teva's. With Quay movements, he swings the legs back and forth, activating a swivelling of the head. Stephen suggests a tracking shot past the vista through both armpit holes. Timothy looks down the loose panties, smells the 'leg mould' growing on the upper thighs. Stephen lays the doll down on her back to close its one working eye. I'm eager to smell this white mould, to be part of a Quay epiphany: this is Schwab's and they've just discovered their next star. This one to be lent out to Koninck Studios by Teva, the twenty-one-year-old Selznick of Olympia, for the doll's talent has already been valued highly by this keen judge of the latent power in unlikely knick-knacks. Noam is present at the epiphany. The doll is to be shipped soon to England – the Quays commence writing her first scenario tomorrow.

21 November

Elise pretended to be my sister for about forty-five minutes worth of theatre sports. Script adaptation for the screen continues with a lot of disorientation on my part. Remember the three-way conflict rules from *Sweet Smell of Success*.

Robert Enright book launch, the excellent *Peregrinations. Dykemaster's Daughter* excerpted in *Border Crossings*. I don't have many extra words in me today. The WP has left my eyes filmy, my ears ringing, my thinking sleepy; add to this the postal strike, the fact that I slept in, and a curious lack of phone calls, and I've had what seems like my own personal Good Friday. Everyone else is bustling around in their usual excited Friday

hormone haze, a horny day-long rush hour, but everything in my personal sphere seems recently sermonized, tranquil, closed and stupid.

28 November

Sold *Gimli Hospital* to Bravo for \$5000. Possibly teaching two courses at U of M for \$8500. E.D. wiring me \$3000. Possible articles to sell to *Border Crossings* and *Take One*. I'm broke but accumulating enough artificial light at the end of the tunnel to feel occasionally giddy. Tonight I shall watch a Velcrow Ripper movie, then formulate a pitch to the WFG for a salon/workshop.

On top of Carl's Fyxx confession that he tried sleeping one drunken night at the age of twenty-three with his own twenty-seven-year-old sister while her husband, his brother-in-law, slept upstairs ('She bought a case of beer and invited me back to her place so I thought: all right,' puts two thumbs up), Steve sits here in the same Fyxx and tells me that at eighteen he went to his first whorehouse – the Samoa Club in Idaho Falls – as an expedient virginity-chaser and tribute to Stephen Daedalus in 'the only readable part of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.' Ten bucks did the trick and an instantaneous conclusion upon first contact made the whole thing painless if not slightly humiliating. The Samoa Club had tall windows with palm-tree silhouettes. Other and subsequent whorehouses in Idaho Falls included the Gem Rooms (across the street), the Hub and the New Grand Hotel. Room with a bed and a bathroom – from the latter emerged the whore in some black-lace easy-on-and-off thing. After loading herself up with lubricant in a haunchy corner, the veteran tutor would grab at Steve for a quick sore inspection, make him useful amid all sorts of Don Martin sound effects, then shove him into the field of play. A cowboy town with plenty of illegal gambling and whoring to keep the spurs jingling, these Idaho Falls transactions of Steve's must have been spongy, swampy, soaked-cake occasions for paralyzed little Steve. Whorehouse right next door to a café where teen Steve learned to drink coffee – two vices learned but twenty feet apart. Infamy!!

4 December

Steve and I at Great Canadian Bagel. Two bagels and mug of coffee: \$2.24! Quiet. Non-smoking means no women come here. Have swum twenty days in a row now. (30/30 today). My 'weight training' is every second day now; thirty minutes of high rep/low weight stuff. 500 reps of 300 lb leg press. 150 reps of all arm work. Really scrawny routines, but I'm getting fitter I swear.

6 December

Twenty-five-day streak at Sargent Park. Ninety minutes today with Steve, the last forty-five minutes in the pool made effortless by my surging strength and thirty synchronized swimmers plying and plashing near this old crocodile. If I can make it till Fri morning, the day I leave for the Genies, I shall have done thirty-one consecutive swimming days.

Steve and I just made a pact, shaking on it, to lose nine pounds by March 6, three months from today, to be achieved by walking more and exacting more fat-content vigilance from ourselves, each other. That will take Steve down from 170 to 161, me down to 166 from 175. With muscle-toning and all that jazz, we shall be dudish drones brimming with health; we shall knock china off shelves with cumbersome and throbbing priapi, carried before us like difficult fire logs.

In July of 1995, some three weeks before my wedding, I accepted an invitation to the Chicago Underground Film Festival for the sole reason that it would give me a chance to meet their guest of honour, Kenneth Anger. Upon arrival, I met a charming festival assistant with the Truffaut-ish name of Nicole Berger, whose job it was to make sure the festival guests got booked into their hotels and made all their appointments. Soon, we were both skipping out of our obligations together, I missing a symposium or two, she abandoning her post at the taxi stands and cocktail parties. We went out for late-night snacks when she should have been debriefing projectionists. I think she had decided she hated her job long before I arrived, so I won't flatter myself that I had any influence over her behaviour.

On my third night there, we took in a tap-dance festival that left us both vibrating with awe. Then, afterwards, at exactly eleven p.m., while strolling in front of the Hilton after a summer

thundershower, we were suddenly kidnapped by a very talkative and skinny young man by the name of Dogg, who implied through a menacing power of suggestion and no gun, that we should accompany him to the nearest automated teller so that he could help himself to my daily maximum withdrawal. As Nicole, Dogg and I strayed further away from the bright lights of the Hilton, the streets became absolutely dark, densely entangled with low branches and unmowed grass. I couldn't believe that the pleasant feeling I'd had just moments before had been detoured into the panicky dread I felt while we tried to grope our way to a bank machine in the dark. Nicole and Dogg were arguing about her alleged racism. I stayed out of it. I tried to wish myself out of this place. Was this sudden reversal of fortune a swift and simple punishment for all the pleasure I had just been craving?

My card wouldn't work in the bank machine, neither would my MasterCard. So Dogg decided he would keep us until the computer lines got untangled. Besides, he was definitely hot after beautiful Nicole by now. Passing street corner after street corner, where he waved at a variety of what he claimed were his boys positioned at their neighbourhood posts, Dogg took us to his bar, some half-mile's walk later, where he bade two gun-packing cronies join us and watch over us as he went about brief business among his gang friends in the dark and clamorous place. He quickly returned and all five of us sat at a table. He told me to order beer with my credit card, which I did. My plastic was now up and running, but Dogg paid that no mind. He was clearly bent on possessing Nicole, either by charm or by force.

Nicole put on a spectacular display of keeping Dogg interested in the art of seduction just long enough to forestall his more violent impulses, then just as our captor moved in for his reward, she would cool off and unflirt with him, pushing him back verbally, demanding some sort of respectful space for herself. Which eventually frustrated and angered the ardent brute until he was on the verge of summoning a spree of violence against her, and me too I guess. (He said he would have us 'popped.') At just this most dangerous moment, she would turn on a dime and reintroduce playfulness and flirtation into her tones, rekindling the hopes of Dogg's inner gent. One moment

she would cup the man's face in her hands and admire it, the next she was dressing him down for his impertinence. In this fashion, back and forth, Nicole kept her menacer at bay for a couple of hours while we all five of us (the two henchmen never said much) kept up the drinking and small talk. We spoke of Winnipeg, Nicole's hometown of LA, and even Minneapolis, a town I know well and Dogg's birthplace. I kept buying rounds. To an observer we two prisoners might have looked only slightly out of place in that club, uncomfortably undemographic but hardly kidnapped. Clearly, Nicole was to be raped, but she and I sparkled out conversation, even laughing loudly at some of Dogg's jokes. (Some were even funny.) The whole evening wore on so slowly it became easy to forget the circumstances. It felt like Dogg was trying to sell us insurance. I forgot to be terrified and grew bored. I longed to return to my room at the Congress for sleep.

Then, in a change of strategy, or just to be sadistic, Dogg ordered me to join him outside. In the blackness of an alley I was to pee for him into a puddle. I couldn't do it in spite of all the beer I'd bought and drunk. Dogg taunted me for being afraid, said he would 'pop' me if I was afraid. Of course I was afraid, and bored and detached and feeling like the script need a better pace, but who can pee on demand anyway? Finally, I dribbled out some urine into a rain puddle in the darkness at my feet and we two menfolk returned to our table. Now it was Nicole's turn to be taken outside. Dogg took her away and I never saw him again. He left me with his boys under the understanding that I was to go nowhere. Poor Nicole had no choice but to go with him.

I spent two more hours with those impassive sidekicks, buying enough beer for their already drug-addled heads finally to render one of them unconscious. He crashed to the floor with a pitcher of ice spilt about his great belly. His gun spilt out, too, onto the floor beside him. No one touched him or his gun. The Tarantino moment for me to grab the gun and get on out just wasn't in me. The gun owner just snoozed on upon the butt-strewn floor for the rest of the night. His comrade kept up a heavy-lidded consciousness; we talked about our kids, each of us had a daughter. He seemed nice, but he had his orders to do me great violence if I attempted to leave.