

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Berlin toasts Pool's 'pearl'

### Quebec filmmaker restores Canada's image

BY GERALD PEARY  
Special to The Globe and Mail  
WEST BERLIN

**C**ANADA IS BACK, as far as the international film circuit is concerned. That heartening news comes courtesy of the 36th Berlin Film Festival, which ended on Tuesday having made Montreal filmmaker Léa Pool's *Anne Trister* the best-received picture in competition, hands down.

In this 11-day festival marked by unsatisfactory movies from everywhere in the world — and often unsatisfied audiences, as a result — Anne Trister was a happy surprise from Quebec. "It's a little pearl," someone said of the co-production with The National Film Board.

Crowds at two official jury screenings, in Berlin's mammoth Zoo-Palast Theatre, applauded with great fervor at the end of Pool's poetic tale of a young Swiss painter who buries her father in the Israeli sand and then goes into exile, flying away to Montreal. The common word from international critics at the festival was that Pool, watched closely because of admiration for her *La Femme de l'Hôtel* (1984), has made a formidable leap ahead with her second feature, which has deeper characterizations, a more empathetic story line and a lovely performance by French actress Albane Guilhe as Anne.

Also, Anne Trister could be that rarity, an arthouse film with cross-over box-office potential, although a few critics complained that Pierre Mignot's cinematography is too beautiful and Pool's structure seems contrived, forcing sentimental reactions from the audience.

At a well-attended news conference after the premiere screening, a German critic wondered why the title character is Jewish. Is Anne Trister autobiographical?

"I have Jewish origins," replied Pool, who immigrated to Canada from Switzerland in 1975. "My father was buried in Israel, but that's the point of departure for this movie. My previous film also had Jewish roots, about people in exile, looking for space. Additionally, with Judaism, there is always the question of patriarchal structures."

Pool then focused on Anne Trister's surrogate father Simon, a nurturing, middle-aged Jew who owns a Montreal delicatessen. He feeds Anne, finds her a studio for painting and comes to the rescue when she falls off a scaffold. "It's like a dream that Father should be always there to save us," she said.

Anne's Freudian journey also involves a search for a caring, sympathetic mother figure, one reason she finds herself falling in love with child psychologist Alix, played by Montreal actress Louise Marleau.

"It's the second time I've worked for Léa," said Marleau, star of *La Femme de l'Hôtel* and easily the most glamorous-looking person in the room. "Straight away, I realized that this was a world familiar to me, perhaps as in Pirandello, a



questioning of reality. But this time we went further. We got to know each other much more, and to get deeper into Léa's universe."

A male Italian critic wanted to know if Anne Trister is "women's cinema." Pool sighed. "I don't know what to say about 'women's cinema.' I'm a woman who made a film; my major character is a woman. But the film involves men as well as women, and the male characters are experiencing the same questions in a minor key. I just didn't want to give them a major role — I wanted to leave room for Anne's quest for love."

The quest ends where it began, in the Israeli desert. "In the desert, things can grow," Pool pointed out. "A North African writer said, 'To be made of sand, not of crystal, lets you be able to fall, and be resurrected.'"

In quieter circumstances, several other Canadian films — invited to the festival but not in competition — were screened to respectful response. Claude Gagnon, the Quebec director known for the unusual and provocative films (*Keiko*) he made while living in Japan, showed his

*Visage Pale*, a cross-cultural thriller about a hockey player on the run seeking refuge on an Indian reserve. And a youthful audience seemed amused by the kitchen-sink brand of formalism of *Downtime*, directed by 25-year-old Greg Hancoc of the Winnipeg Film Group, despite its uncomfortable similarity to U.S. director Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise*.

The most emotionally charged audience response was reserved, not surprisingly, for the NFB's *Dark Lullabies*, which shows Montreal filmmaker Irene Angelico, daughter of Auschwitz survivors, meeting young Germans whose parents and grandparents were Nazis.

Angelico attended several Berlin screenings and thought them "very intense, very emotional, painful for the German audience, mostly in their twenties and thirties. Afterward, people thanked me, but they talked about their inability to get the older generation to speak. I've heard over and over, 'There's nothing to do.' They feel trapped by their history."

Angelico was moved especially by a young man, the grandson of



Nazis, who told her: "To us in Germany, it's an affront to listen to the radio and hear the traffic report from Dachau (near Munich), and know that ordinary life goes on there today."

It was by coincidence that Angelico encountered her film in Berlin. She was one of five Canadian filmmakers (along with Patricia Gruben and Jan-Marie Martell from Vancouver, Bruce Elder from Toronto and Jean Beaudin from Montreal) who toured the country for two weeks as guests of the West German Government and ended up with five days at the festival. Along the way, they were introduced to a whole spectrum of German filmmakers, from low-budget experimentalists at the Cologne Film House to such formidable talents as Alexander Kluge, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Das Boot's Wolfgang Peterson, back from Hollywood and *The Neverending Story* and the much less acclaimed *Enemy Mine*.



Along the way, several in the group had a special mission: to spread the cause of Canadian experimental filmmaking in West Germany. "In England, Canada House bought prints of 13 of our experimental works and circulates them free of charge across the country," Patricia Gruben said. "As a result of such exposure, Canadian programs are said to be the best-attended experimental screenings in London."

While touring Bonn, Gruben approached people at the Canadian consulate about a similar idea for West Germany, offering to help. "They have been dispensing NFB documentaries about salmon fishing and the St. Lawrence Seaway. But by the end of our stay in Bonn, they decided it would be good to have available an evening of Canadian experimental films." Gruben agreed to draft a formal proposal when she returns to Vancouver; the consulate agreed to put an item in

The most emotionally charged audience response was reserved, not surprisingly, for the NFB's *Dark Lullabies*, which shows Montreal filmmaker Irene Angelico, daughter of Auschwitz survivors, meeting young Germans whose parents and grandparents were Nazis.

Angelico attended several Berlin screenings and thought them "very intense, very emotional, painful for the German audience, mostly in their twenties and thirties. Afterward, people thanked me, but they talked about their inability to get the older generation to speak. I've heard over and over, 'There's nothing to do.' They feel trapped by their history."

Angelico was moved especially by a young man, the grandson of

Nazis, who told her: "To us in Germany, it's an affront to listen to the radio and hear the traffic report from Dachau (near Munich), and know that ordinary life goes on there today."

It was by coincidence that Angelico encountered her film in Berlin. She was one five Canadian filmmakers (along with Patricia Gruben and Jan-Marie Martell from Vancouver, Bruce Elder from Toronto and Jean Beaudin from Montreal) who toured the country for two weeks as guests of the West German Government and ended up with five days at the festival. Along the way, they were introduced to a whole spectrum of German filmmakers, from low-budget experimentalists at the Cologne Film House to such formidable talents as Alexander Kluge, Hans-Jurgen Syberberg and Das Boot's Wolfgang Peterson, back from Hollywood and *The Neverending Story* and the much less acclaimed *Enemy Mine*.