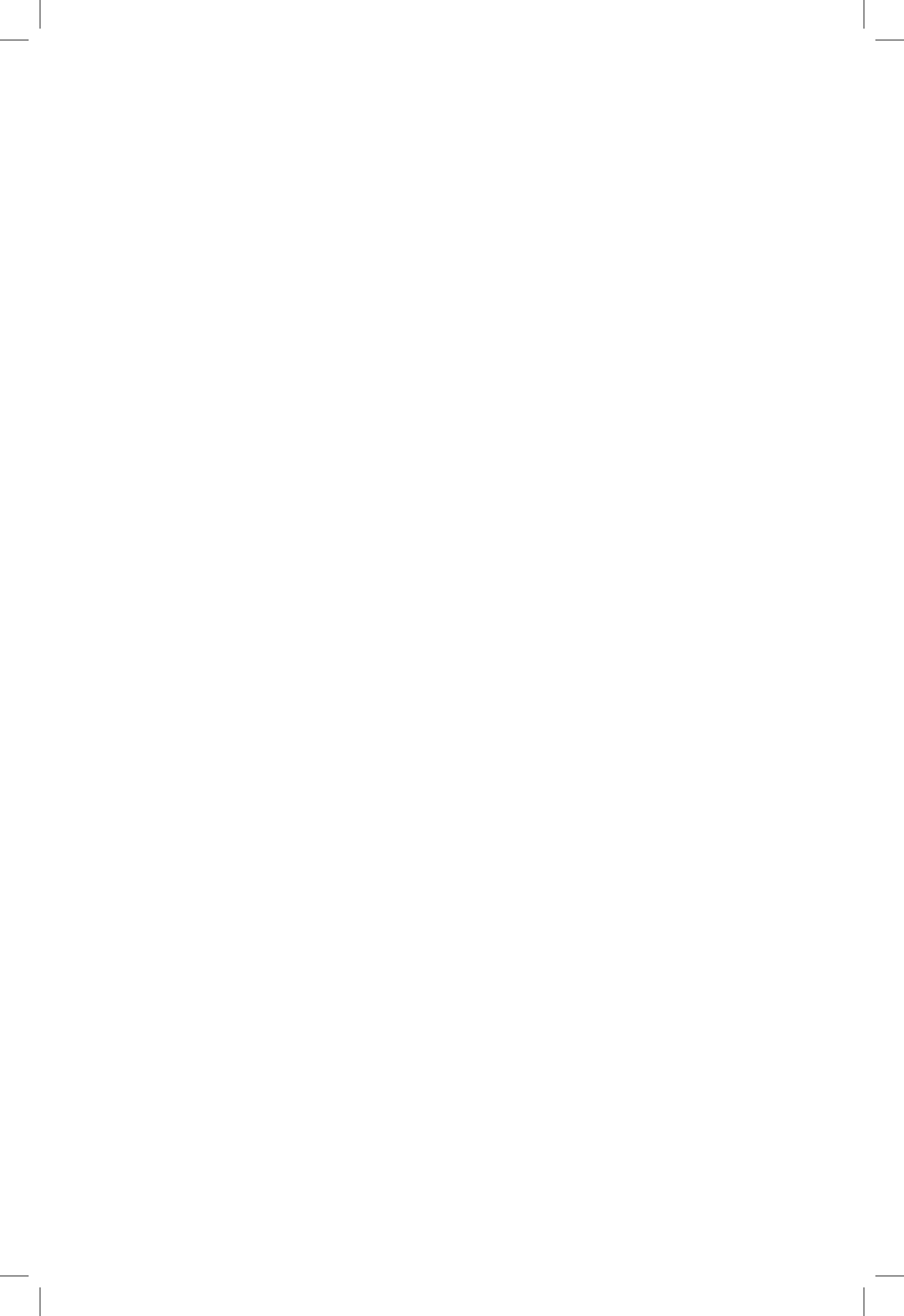


PLAYING WITH MEMORIES
ESSAYS ON GUY MADDIN

EDITED BY DAVID CHURCH



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University of Manitoba Press

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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Foreword	
GEOFF PEVERE	XI
Bark Fish Appreciation: An Introduction	
DAVID CHURCH	1
My Brother's Keeper: Fraternal Relations in the Films of Guy Maddin and George Toles	
DONALD MASTERSON	26
Guy Maddin: True to Form	
GEOFF PEVERE	48
Reinhabiting Lost Languages: Guy Maddin's <i>Careful</i>	
WILL STRAW	58
Fire and Ice: The Films of Guy Maddin	
STEVEN SHAVIRO	70
Maddin and Melodrama	
WILLIAM BEARD	79
Thoroughly Modern Maddin	
DAVID L. PIKE	96
Sexuality and Self in the Guy Maddin Vision	
STEPHEN SNYDER	119

The Heart of His World: Emotional Immediacy and Distance in the Films of Guy Maddin CARL MATHESON	133
From Archangel to Mandragora in Your Own Backyard: Collaborating with Guy Maddin GEORGE TOLES	144
Guy Maddin's <i>Dracula</i> : Virgins, Vampires, and the "Theatre Film" MILAN PRIBISIC	159
Demented Enchantments: Maddin's Dis-eased Heart DANA COOLEY	171
Desire in Bondage: Guy Maddin's <i>Careful</i> DARRELL VARGA	190
Hit with a Wrecking Ball, Tickled with a Feather: Gesture, Deixis, and the Baroque Cinema of Guy Maddin SAIGE WALTON	203
"I'm Not an American; I'm a Nymphomaniac": Perverting the Nation in Guy Maddin's <i>The Saddest Music in The World</i> LEE EASTON AND KELLY HEWSON	224
Conversations with Guy Maddin INTERVIEW BY WILLIAM BEARD	239
Filmography	266
Selected Bibliography	269
Notes on Contributors	272

BARK FISH APPRECIATION: AN INTRODUCTION

DAVID CHURCH

Sometimes he intentionally separated himself from his favourite toys, and played with the memories of them. And then played with the memories of the memories. There were inexhaustible powers of renewal within these two homes for the CHILD WITHOUT QUALITIES.

—Guy Maddin, from his unfilmed treatment
*The Child Without Qualities*¹

I wanted to design little stories that were, I hoped, original ways of showing people themselves. But I also wanted to just indulge myself in the surprisingly tasty textures of audio scratches and acting devices and cutting techniques of a forgotten film vocabulary. And for some reason, that film vocabulary seemed just as sexy and new as the women in those 1920s films. They seem sort of eternally new every time I look at them, and more beautiful each time, almost. I almost feel as if the excitement I feel is necrophilia of some sort. If that's what necrophilia is, then so be it.

—Guy Maddin²

The movies of Guy Maddin are an uncanny amalgamation of personal obsessions and private memories made public. Maddin's fears and desires sparkle forth amid melodramatic tropes so winkingly heightened and bizarre that every new convolution begs for laughter. Lovingly digesting the visual tropes of archaic cinema, he infuses his fervid narratives with a gaze into the dusty corners of the medium's bygone years, drawing upon an encyclopedic (and largely self-taught) knowledge of classic film. Whether inspired by the stylistic innovations of Abel Gance, Sergei Eisenstein, and Jean Vigo, or the deliberate anti-realism of Luis Buñuel, Josef von Sternberg, and Douglas Sirk, he layers his low-budget tableaux with the grain and grime of decades long gone, evoking a time when movies were still taking on strange lateral developments. In collaboration with long-time writing partner George Toles, Maddin makes the sort of pictures that he dreams had been made by directors both great and forgotten, but in doing so he paradoxically creates something strikingly new and original in contemporary cinema.

Despite an idiosyncratic and distinctly recognizable aesthetic widely praised by critics, Maddin's movies have proved somewhat difficult to describe, earning (largely misplaced) comparisons to contemporary filmmakers as disparate as David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, and Lars von Trier. While some detractors have accused Maddin of empty formalism and pretentious self-indulgence (often blaming the evacuation of meaning supposedly endemic to postmodern art), other critics have delighted in his playfully em-purpled evocations of the past. His films have been much commented upon but little analyzed, frequently relegated to the sidelines of academic discussion as charmingly opaque oddities. There is a tellingly absurd moment in Maddin's first feature, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* (1988), in which Einar, in a lustful but unsuccessful ploy to gain the nurses' attention, allows Gunnar to teach him the Icelandic hobbies of "bark fish cutting" and "bark fish appreciation." In the midst of their delirium, the two bedridden men pass the time by crudely cutting pieces of tree bark into the shapes of fish, and then pondering intently at their primitive and decidedly inartistic-looking creations. This eccentric and seemingly throwaway detail within the film is perhaps indicative of more than Maddin's mockery of his self-serious Icelandic heritage; it implies that there is something almost ridiculous about the very task of looking too deeply into his own deliberately primitive handiwork as well. For example, explaining the relative scarcity of allegorical content in his work, he observes that "the idea of storytelling, as far back as campfires and Cro-Magnons, is that it's supposed to be entertaining and engaging, not a cryptoquote to be

solved and then disposed of.”³ I want to briefly suggest, however, following the above epigraphs, that Maddin’s libidinal and mnemonic overinvestment in “dead” cinematic styles serves a personally, and perhaps even culturally, revitalizing function, rendering memory into material form as a sort of necrophilic art.

A caveat before proceeding: in a book of this nature, the velvet-lined trap of auteurist criticism is perhaps inevitable to some degree, but all the more so for a cine-literate director who has, through a plethora of candid interviews and commentaries, self-consciously performed the role of auteur, cultivating powerful connections between his films and his own life. Given the deeply personal nature of his films, it would be difficult to properly unfold the major themes of Maddin’s oeuvre without detouring through his own history, even though it may be near impossible to separate indisputably true events from the more emotionally “truthful” self-mythology he has woven.

* * *

Born on February 28, 1956, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to a family of Icelandic-Canadian descent, young Guy Arthur Maddin’s formative years were split between two sites forever associated with each of his parents: the beauty shop owned by his mother Herdis and aunt Lil, located adjacent to his family’s apartment; and the cavernous Winnipeg Arena, home of the Winnipeg Maroons, the hockey team for whom his father Chas was general manager. Much of his childhood experience stemmed from being the youngest of the family’s four children.⁴ With his older siblings Ross, Cameron, and Janet already within the grips of adolescence by the time he reached cognizance, Guy found himself in a household that had apparently seen its best days in the years before his birth. He analyzed the family history that preceded him, playing with hand-me-down objects and the associated memories of fonder times.⁵ “To be born to old parents is to be given the gift related to nostalgia,” he once wrote of the struggle to understand and please one’s family. “One has to work that much harder, look backwards so much further, to make real as people one’s parents, grandparents—even pets!”⁶ At night he was lulled to sleep by detuned radio and TV shows, tucked in by blankets of static fuzz as the broadcasts struggled their way across Manitoba’s icebound prairie. These early forces may have inspired Maddin’s love of degraded imagery and archaic forms—but it was not a simple rose-tinted nostalgia that resulted, for darker events soon unfolded.

In February 1963, only a week before Guy's seventh birthday, teenage Cameron shot himself upon the grave of his recently deceased girlfriend. Cameron's death marked Guy deeply, leaving him a "living ambassador of [his] dead brother, as this living ambassador of suicide" until about age twenty, and in *My Winnipeg* (2007) he describes the year 1963 as perhaps the key to all that makes him what he is.⁷ It was only after this traumatic incident that he sensed that his was a family in decline. The celebrity once enjoyed by his father was on the wane following the corporate merger that transformed the Maroons into Canada's national hockey team. Several years later, Guy was "cast into the role of an unlikely mediator trying to bring peace" between his mother and teenage sister.⁸ The matriarch's Lutheran strictures and desire for control clashed with the precocious teen in a series of nasty quarrels—and mothers have played a significant role in Maddin's films ever since, typically portrayed as powerful, domineering, or repressive.

The place of fathers has also been a seminal element in Maddin's work, owing in large part to his father's premature death from a stroke in June 1977. As with the passing of his brother and grandmother, Guy was stunned by the loss, and yet somehow unable to properly grieve: "I was shocked that I wasn't hit with the tsunami of grief that I thought I would be. I wasn't even upset. I realized that some psychological mechanism had kicked in—the grief would overdraw me at the bank and I would have to pay on the instalment plan. I make these weekly payments during my dreams, paying in tears for all of the loved ones I have lost."⁹ Chas's death struck him as more of a desertion than a tragedy, as if his father had merely shirked his duties and gone to live with another family.¹⁰ Persistent dreams about Chas's return would later inspire Maddin to pick up the camera and shoot his first short, *The Dead Father* (1986); fathers have subsequently been portrayed as either deceased, absent, or cowardly in virtually all of Maddin's pictures. These early traumas surface repeatedly like so much scar tissue, but he is no mere miserablist. Familial strife commingles with heartfelt nostalgia, met by a strong gallows humour, as though suggesting the absurdity of remaining fixedly in the past and obsessively uncovering such old wounds. Desire always teeters on the edge of despair in his work,¹¹ and his resolutely self-destructive characters often repress their sadness, sublimating it into strange or inappropriate forms, only to rediscover it too late—as with the wave of catharsis channelled into a single tear at the endings of *Careful* (1992) and *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003).

Maddin worked as a bank manager, house painter, and photo archivist in the years before turning to film. In late 1979, he gravitated toward film classes taught at the University of Manitoba by professors George Toles and Stephen Snyder. Maddin quickly fell in love with their degraded 16-mm prints and fifth-generation film-to-video transfers of old movies, ranging from Buñuel's early surrealism to Dreyer's stark Lutheran melodramas to the nascent thrills of pre-code Hollywood.¹² Inspired by the artifice and primitivism of Snyder's own experimental shorts and the films of fellow Winnipegger John Paizs, Maddin began learning how to make movies. He joined the Winnipeg Film Group—an artists' cooperative responsible for much of the "Prairie Surrealism" committed to celluloid—and, armed with his rudimentary knowledge of filmmaking, completed *The Dead Father* over a span of three years. Its deeply personal story of a son revisited by his briefly revived father bears strong indications of the strange humour and archaic stylings that Maddin would increasingly pursue over his next three films. Aside from a voice-over and intermittent sound effects, the film is mostly silent, setting the stage for his subsequent "part-talkies." For Maddin, silent (or at least quasi-silent) films have become such a wellspring of inspiration because they "seem like the perfect stepping stone between the literal-minded movies of today and all other art forms, plastic or otherwise." Unlike the verisimilitude demanded by so much of contemporary film, silent cinema "is already far too stylized, monochromatic and, well, silent, to even begin to represent reality to sophisticated modern viewers. To most viewers, it might as well be painting, poetry, or classical music."¹³ In this light, the belated bereavement in *The Dead Father* displays an early attempt to capture "the spirit of prose poetry"¹⁴ in his work. Maddin proudly works under the banner of primitivism—which, at the beginning of his career, was largely due to economic and technical necessity, having neither large production budgets nor formal training—but it remains a vital part of his work, something more than the makeshift sets, Vaseline-smearing lenses, and flickering 8-mm and 16-mm footage. Like the bark fish, Maddin's films seem personally handcrafted, left with rough edges by the act of cutting and shaping, laden with the mythos of his own history (in contrast to the mass-produced newness of much contemporary cinema).

This aesthetic is refined in *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* (1988), a folktale inspired by a period of intense male rivalry and set during an 1876 smallpox epidemic that devastated the Icelandic immigrant population of Gimli, Manitoba. Although he found that descendents of these immigrants were

“humourlessly obsessed with their own history,”¹⁵ Maddin began dressing up his cultural heritage as absurdist comedy. He used this taboo topic as an “irritant,” something “to make people squirm,”¹⁶ like the speck of sand that grows a pearl—in this case, playing his ancestors’ pestilence for laughs. For many viewers, however, perhaps the film’s most obvious broken taboo is its coy depiction of necrophilia—which relates directly to the symbol of bark fish. Insignificant at first glance, the bark fish ultimately prove crucial to the loosely assembled narrative, for it was Gunnar’s wife Snjófrídur who originally taught him the hobby. The sight of her bark-cutting shears triggers Gunnar’s recollections of her untimely death during their honeymoon—while for Einar, it prompts his inadvertent confession that he had stolen the shears after performing sex with Snjófrídur’s corpse. The creative act of bark fish cutting, like the act of filmmaking, infuses crude material forms with powerful memories. This is why the themes of decay and necrophilia that reappear in Maddin’s films are not merely taboos to be exploited, but in many ways reflect the formal strategies he employs, most notably a perverse fetishization of “dead” cinematic styles. For example, *Gimli Hospital* assumes the look of a part-talkie, aping the awkward emergence of sync-sound films, but Maddin strongly eroticizes the very archaism of his depictions; the crackling ambient soundtrack and expressionistic lighting seem as freighted with authorial desire as the pre-code nudity of Snjófrídur’s bare backside and the dense makeup worn by the much-lusted-after (but suspiciously young) nurses.

For Maddin, tropes from old movies become mnemonics for not only the cultural past, but ghosts from his personal past. He seems forever placing both past and present objects of desire (e.g., lost romantic loves, deceased family members) at a faux-historical distance, relegating them to the dustbin of history as unnaturally old and impossibly unattainable.¹⁷ When he frequently resurrects the dead in his films, it is, in his own words, “a quick shorthand for the desire to see someone again who has been removed from me, or from a character, through death or rejection.”¹⁸ The dramatic “heart-to-heart resuscitation” in *Brand Upon the Brain!* (2006) self-reflexively visualizes this key component of Maddin’s aesthetic: subjecting oneself to great pain in order to revive the dead with a powerful love. If his films are necrophilic, it is not to destructively defile or exploit the past, but to retool its lost potential (as Dana Cooley similarly asserts later in this collection) by simulating and then affectively refilling discarded containers of cultural memory with intensely personal feelings of desire and despair. However, an illusory raising of the

dead is only achievable by making one's memories affectively tangible within the dreamlike realm of cinematic fantasy. This limitation is manifestly acknowledged through Maddin's constant emphasis upon the materiality of film, restoring his loves (both cinematic and autobiographical) not in a state of pristine newness, but showing heavily fetishized signs of decay.

* * *

Despite Maddin's desire to evade easy classification, his "romantic kitsch hybrids"¹⁹ all share some common qualities, primarily motivated by the vagaries of memory. His stories intentionally evoke the structure of fairy tales as a means of disguising certain autobiographical details, but also to preserve the truthful heightenings of emotion that one finds in such supposedly juvenile literary forms. "The bedtime stories told to us as children can never be completely fathomed, but they can be felt—much the way sophisticated art for adults operates, so I make virtually no distinction," says Maddin.²⁰ His films are playfully regressive, even childlike in their means of self-mythologizing his own life or his hometown of Winnipeg. However, as in the literary inspirations of Bruno Schulz, Robert Walser, and Robert Musil, Maddin's memories are tinged with melancholy as "rotten myths," leaving him rejecting and sorting certain childhood feelings that initially seem convincing but fail to properly explain the workings of the world and its inhabitants.²¹ Shooting largely instinctually, often with only a few seconds given to each decision, he taps into the ways that actual events are affectively distorted into basic, enduring tropes (e.g., cruel parents, weak/absent fathers, cowardly sons, competitive siblings, jealous lovers) by memory and dreams. "The only real themes that matter to me are how humans love each other or hate each other or are envious of each other," he observes. "All the timeless stuff"²² For Maddin, there is little capacity for humans to change, improve, or fail to repeat prior mistakes. Reflecting the filmmaker's own fixations, his characters are driven by irrational desires—cowardice, sexual jealousy, incestuous urges, unrequited love, etc.—fated into revisiting the exquisite joys and pains that might otherwise remain better off repressed into a haze of quaint ambiguity.

His narratives profess not only the influence of fairy tales, but also the results of amnesia, which Maddin believes is a universal condition: "Forgetfulness is a kind of anaesthetic for the painful life we all live. We're forced to constantly think about the shameful things we've done, the painful things that have happened to us. We owe most of the feelings we have, as

sensate beings, to shoddy memories.”²³ For Maddin, amnesia explains how people can forget their responsibilities to family, loved ones, and friends. This dominant narrative motif appears in many guises throughout his work, stretching from the dazed and grieving son in *The Dead Father* to *My Winnipeg*’s sleepwalking inhabitants, but it reaches its apotheosis in *Archangel* (1990). Inspired by World War I propaganda films and a smattering of historical trivia, the film is set in a snowbound outpost on the Russian frontier where no one has bothered to tell the troops that the Great War has ended. Soldiers from nations large and small now fight on sleepily through the haze of memory, filling the conflict’s absurd emptiness with their own personal crusades; for example, Canadian army lieutenant John Boles mistakes another woman for his lost love Iris, imagining the demonized Germanic hordes as rivals for her affections. Melodramatic emotions and individual motivations are muted into a melancholy blankness as lovers/fighters forget their relationships but remain intensely dedicated to shifting conceptions of love, marching fixedly onward in real and imagined battlefields as the loose narrative circles back upon itself. If his narratives are often elliptical, it is because the processes of editing and remembering echo each other: not following a linear trajectory, certain details are cut out while others are amplified, springing back into consciousness when one least expects.²⁴

In a more conscious form, Maddin links amnesia to a recurrent theme of cowardice, with men and women (but especially men) being cowardly in love or otherwise shirking their duties—such as the “Guy Maddin” character in *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2003), who manages to forget his girlfriend upon the abortionist’s operating table, becoming yet another father who flees his family out of spinelessness. Since amnesia allows one to forget pains and promises alike, it also allows Maddin to continually revisit these ordeals in his films, repeating his mistakes, each time stumbling upon them with a renewed emotional intensity shot through with the uncanny. As we are told in *Brand Upon the Brain!* everything happens twice because emotions exceed containment when memory fails to suitably capture events the first time around. Maddin admits in *My Winnipeg* that he sometimes even forgets who is alive and who is dead—but his films preserve such personal ghosts, trapping them on seemingly pre-decayed celluloid, lingering just barely above the forgetful abyss of history as well. As Geoff Pevere suggests, however, Maddin’s formal aesthetic also reflects a broader sense of amnesia, haphazardly layering filmic references that “seem less the product of a single imagination than of an entire

culture's. A culture that shares something fundamental with the lost souls who stumble their way through Maddin's movies; a culture that's having a hard time remembering who it is and where it's been."²⁵ Whether alluding to films half-remembered, unseen, or altogether forgotten by history, Maddin is not trying to faithfully recreate past cinematic styles, but rather "cannibalizes" such traits "as part of [his] vocabulary the way other people use words."²⁶ His necrophilic usage of archaic films suggests that he is too cowardly to express his fears and desires through a contemporary, "living" film style; indeed, his least successful works, such as *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997) and *The Hands of Ida* (1995), are arguably those that eschew the comforts of a postmodern or retro-modern pastiche of older styles. Like an amnesiac, he seems to lose himself in his love of dead forms, but inevitably returns to the core of memory that inspires his overarching affective investment in loss and decay.

A case in point is *Careful* (1992), in which he excavates the German *Bergfilm* (or mountain film), a dead historical subgenre whose place as a container of cultural memory is long past, allowing Maddin to obsessively transform it into a mnemonic for more personal issues. Perhaps set in the mountains of British Columbia or Switzerland, this melodrama about dark family secrets held in check by severe social strictures uses a pro-incest "irritant" as a reaction against "the people who felt left out if they didn't have any horror story of [child] abuse, who felt it was trendy to get diddled."²⁷ The film also bespeaks the huge role of mothers for both Toles and Maddin: a desire to return to the womb, mixed with a dread of emotional closeness to such looming authority figures. There is little recourse to subtext in Maddin's films, leaving such raw impulses playing out upon the stylized surface of things—but the autobiographical nature of his work ensures that it is never *just* surface. The double-edged psychosexuality in so much of his output is a prime example: his violently Oedipal plots amplify hoary old Freudian master narratives to the point of ironic ridicule—and yet the tired plight of Oedipus also finds justification in Maddin's assertion that, yes, these twisted emotional brambles truly are (at least to some degree) rooted in his own life experience. The dense layers of artifice and excess suggest that Maddin is performing personal history as much as cinematic history, but there are genuine emotions beneath his self-reflexive performance.

While high emotions in film are largely disparaged today (especially by the educated middle-class spectators who comprise the bulk of Maddin's viewership), he revels in these feelings, provocatively exhibiting them before

those audiences who might routinely disavow such sensation. In the tone of a manifesto, Maddin declaims: “In our lives, melodrama is hyperbolized, it’s the narrative of our dreams with all the nocturnal terrors and desires given the respect they deserve. It’s the chaos of the everyday ordered into an obedient cast of characters we can understand. . . . These magnifications happen in our nightmares and our movies again and again, not because of lapses in taste, but because they are the TRUTH. Melodrama makes our true feelings easier to recognize. Much like the philosophical dictum declaring that everything more or less tastes like chicken, all good stories contain at least traces of melodrama.”²⁸ Using archaic film styles as personal touchstones, he recollects his own life through the same fervid optics encouraged by cinematic containers of cultural memory that may today be frowned upon by high culture audiences as maudlin and manipulative, ignored by mass audiences as outdated and pretentious, or altogether dismissed as unapproachably bizarre. By temporally uprooting once-popular, now-marginalized forms like silent film or melodrama, Maddin highlights the historical variability of taste, yet maintains a belief in certain timeless themes and feelings that should not be rejected, even if their particular shapes of expression have fallen out of vogue.

Making an emotionally eviscerating movie is one of Maddin’s stated goals, but contemporary ironic reading strategies drain much of the potential for melodramatic affect, allowing his aesthetic to be interpreted as merely an exercise in alienation and emotional flatness. Maddin claims, however, that contemporary irony and melodrama are *not* mutually exclusive, for he is often captivated as much by irony as pure emotion (as in Sirk’s films), depending upon a given film’s success or failure at tugging the heartstrings.²⁹ Camp, for example, certainly is/was one expression of this dynamic, traditionally blending pathos and heightened emotionality beneath thick layers of nostalgia and artifice—but camp has also become emotionally neutral with its increasing ubiquity in mainstream (straight) culture, and we can see this tension between camp’s affective capacities in the potential reactions that viewers have to Maddin’s films.³⁰ The ability for viewers to experience his work in such varied ways is, in a sense, a built-in defence mechanism, a means of engaging the audience’s interest at all costs. After all, he suspects that responses to his films will be closer to those attending the historical avant-garde than attending a mere nostalgic replication of past forms: “I want to unlearn how to watch movies. I want to flip dyslexically the images of my film to jangle their readability for the viewers; I want to re-create the thrill I felt as a boy when I

finally recognized three words in a row!”³¹ While we may feel too alienated from his films to experience powerful emotions in a traditional sense, we are given plenty of access to other kinds of affect, such as the pleasures of distanciation, intertextuality, and humour. For Maddin, what is most important is sentiment, but even if tears do not result, it is enough to make contemporary audiences feel something—*anything*—in the chance that they might someday overlook the present historical moment’s aversion to melodrama (see William Beard’s essay in the coming pages) and affectively use his own films the way he has used “dead” film styles.

Linked to his uncanny reanimation of archaic cinema is a dissociative sense of strangeness, which has arguably become a major component of his cult reputation, setting his movies apart from others consumed within the same predominantly bourgeois cultural stratum of “art cinema.”³² Maddin’s work is not a celebration of exploitation or “trash” cinema (as is so much of contemporary cult film), but rather a memorial to more “legitimate” film styles that have been discarded by history—and perhaps most importantly for those who hail him as a cult director, discarded by “mainstream” audiences. Maddin cultists may favour the perverse eccentricities of his work in opposition to the supposed respectability of “high art,” even as they paradoxically rely upon bourgeois reading strategies to differentiate themselves from “the masses.”³³ As cult objects, Maddin’s films undoubtedly reward those with high-culture reading competences, whether educated viewers with a strong knowledge of film history or those privileging form over content, but viewers can also invoke the pleasures of subcultural distinction. Maddin’s various images of grotesque or taboo sexuality and violence (necrophilia, cannibalism, incest, fisting, disembowelment, etc.) are, for example, often interpreted through the distanced lenses of irony, excess, and camp, but cultists may fetishize the low-cultural qualities of such imagery in order to distinguish themselves from the supposedly effete, erudite high-culture contingent of his viewership.

While several critics have observed that the degraded look of his films reflects the degradation of his characters themselves, this quality gives his work an almost illicit air, making it seem all the more exclusive for cultists. Moya Luckett claims that “the dynamic between looking and repulsion is the core pleasure of many cult film genres,”³⁴ and this tension is reflected in the very form of Maddin’s films: our vision is focussed by the countless iris shots, blurred lenses, simulated degradation, and deliberate artifice, even as

those same qualities put us off from his densely stylized images. Voyeurism is encouraged, but simultaneously made difficult or even punished—as exemplified by the scenes of unpleasurable looking in several of his pictures.³⁵ Supplementing the pains and humiliations that eternally return in his narratives, this potentially masochistic affect is one of the ways that Maddin makes his mnemonics tangible for the viewer through a libidinal overinvestment in the decaying materiality of cinema’s historical “bodies.”

* * *

After the critical success of *Careful*, Maddin spent the following few years in preparations on *The Dykemaster’s Daughter*, a feature with necrophilia literally at its heart. The project was envisioned as an operatic musical, set either in nineteenth-century Holland or on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, about a male automaton brought to life containing the hearts of two dead men: the effeminate singer Ole, once engaged to the dykemaster’s daughter Catharijna, and his brutish murderer, Tede, a would-be successor to the lofty status of dykemaster. Loved by both Catharijna and the alchemist Mergel, the automaton eventually breaks free from his master’s control, unleashing a disastrous flood that washes the tangled web of lovers into oblivion. The film was in preproduction by the time that financiers at Telefilm Canada pulled out, describing the picture as “a lateral move” for Maddin.³⁶ Although many of his films are financed in part by federal or provincial funding, he remains ambivalent about his relationship to public monies: grateful to receive them, but nervous about the constraints of “Canadian content” quotas. He rejects the Canadian film industry’s emulation of American filmmaking models, believing impersonally made, poorly distributed films to be the result.³⁷

Such would be the fate of his return to feature films, *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997), a dreamlike 35-mm fantasy that misfired with critics and audiences alike. Perhaps out of fears that he had “worn out [his] personal mythologies,”³⁸ Maddin not only ceded sole scriptwriting duties to Toles for the first time, but relinquished his antiquated visual style at the urging of his producers. With his film stripped of its handcrafted primitivism and signs of decay, Maddin was left doubting the worth of such pleasurable artifice: “If these people, Telefilm, Alliance, etc., had simply listened to me when I tried to explain how I took a short-cut 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.”³⁹

Overcoming the belief that he would never shoot another film, he picked up the camera anew in 1997 to shoot *Love-Chaunt in the Chimney*, a “really nicely dovetailed amalgamation of Herman Melville short stories stuck together” by Toles.⁴⁰ Attempting to recover confidence after the *Ice Nymphs* debacle, Maddin assembled a loyal cast and crew of friends to shoot this small, low-budget feature in conjunction with several separately financed short films. After amassing a huge amount of footage, Maddin and editor John Gurdebeke began experimenting with step-printing to further fetishize the images: manipulating the speed of motion, repeating and reversing movements, making images flicker and stutter for an instant before searing into the frame. These experiments (eventually released in 2005 as *Fuseboy*, *Rooster Workbook*, *Zookeeper Workbook*, and *Chimney Workbook*) were the only survivors of a fire set by vandals in Maddin’s garage, which destroyed virtually all other footage of the unfinished feature. However, they would prove forerunners of the “neurological editing” used extensively by Maddin and Gurdebeke in *Cowards Bend the Knee* and *Brand Upon the Brain!* Bearing visual similarities to the work of experimental filmmakers like Martin Arnold and Matthias Müller, this digital editing style does not seek to directly replicate the processes of memory, instead amplifying Maddin’s links between affective memory and bodily sensation—bombarding the viewer’s delicate eyeballs with flashes and spurts of images that jangle the nerves, lingering just below the surface of conscious recognition before surging repeatedly into view, like sense memories being involuntarily sorted by the mind according to intensity.

In the late 1990s, Maddin began teaching film classes at the University of Manitoba. One of his students, Deco Dawson, inspired him to begin using Super-8 format and micro-montage in his films. Determined to use more rapid editing in the wake of *Ice Nymphs*, he and Dawson turned to the most frenetic of Soviet Montage films for their muse. These studies yielded *The Heart of the World* (2000), a delirious blend of agitprop and apocalyptic melodrama, originally commissioned for the Toronto International Film Festival’s twenty-fifth anniversary. Channelling Gance’s *La fin du monde* (1931) amid Russian constructivist trappings, Maddin compresses an expansive, would-be feature-length plot into six short minutes: a beautiful state scientist sacrifices the promise of passion and wealth to become the new heart of the

world, saving humanity as a beacon of love and cinema. There is something patently ridiculous about Maddin's propagandistic fervour here, but a valid revolutionary desire remains. By his own admission, he was attracted to the idea that a person "stymied by indecision in a love triangle or a love quadrangle" could escape jealousy and temptation altogether, undertaking the quixotically altruistic task of "sav[ing] the world by producing... ironically, its biggest opiate since religion. Actually, it was just an excuse for a new creation myth of cinema."⁴¹ While the film is a sort of self-contained manifesto for his overall aesthetic, Mark Peranson has read Maddin's celebrated plunge into Toronto—the heart of the Canadian cinema world—through a more political lens:

Maddin's seemingly disposable entertainment, made for the same festival that rejected *Gimli*, ends with the self-sacrifice of its heroine, who, after choking the evil, cigar-chomping industrialist Akmatov (played by Maddin's former producer, Greg Klymkiw), descends to the earth's heart, saving the world and "creating" film. In *La fin du monde*, Gance himself played Jean Novalic, the son of the astronomer who discovers the approaching comet. Jean becomes a would-be messiah, denouncing the ribald excesses of humanity and getting himself crucified. How Maddin, his congested career at the time in a semi-constant state of torment with regards to filming and funding, would identify is obvious.⁴²

Having apparently reinvented himself, Maddin's next project would be an unlikely one, born of economic necessity: a made-for-TV adaptation of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Dracula*. Although Maddin had little affection for ballet (filmed or otherwise), Bram Stoker's novel, or even vampire movies in general, he was determined to "treat it like a movie where dancers just happened to be performing the roles,"⁴³ using micro-montage, intertitles, and other silent cinema techniques. As with many of his films, *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* (2002) takes not only male jealousy and sexual repression as its narrative core, but the pains and pleasures of loving the (un)dead.

Maddin's *Dracula* was followed by his largest and most widely seen production to date, *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003). While novelist Kazuo Ishiguro's original screenplay was a satire about Third World nations exploiting themselves for alms upon the international stage, Maddin was somewhat uncomfortable with such a blatant political allegory until he and George Toles drastically rewrote the script around a family melodrama set

in Winnipeg during a brewery competition to discover the titular music.⁴⁴ Although this change allows the film to more affectively act as a repository for Maddin's personal memories, it also makes greater appeals to the "timeless" emotional commonalities of viewers' own experiences (should they accept to be so moved).

* * *

While in preproduction on *Saddest Music*, Maddin was commissioned to make a gallery installation that became *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2003), a heavily autobiographical story refracting Maddin's memories from his early days in Lil's Beauty Shop and the Winnipeg Arena. A blend of *Electra*, *The Hands of Orlac*, and film noir, it is the first movie in a personal trilogy featuring "Guy Maddin" as protagonist—an especially masochistic choice on his part to let viewers peer in at his most painful personal secrets. In the film, amnesiac hockey player Guy does not assert responsibility for his most irrational actions, deserting his girlfriend and becoming a multiple murderer at the behest of a woman obsessed with her dead father, Chas. In doing so, Guy finally joins the pantheon of cowardly men who have deserted their responsibilities and fallen into ignominy. In revealing such fears and shames throughout the trilogy, Maddin is reaching toward a more mature self-awareness of the past, using cinematic doppelgängers to dissect the workings of memory within his own adult life. The films retain the fairy-tale quality of his earlier work, but with less naive results. The appeals to artifice and ironic distance are less pronounced here, allowing his defences to fall away, revealing deeper "truths" and emotional poignancy.

That level of exposure is evident in his first feature shot outside of Winnipeg, *Brand Upon the Brain!* (2006), a childhood remembrance story about young "Guy Maddin" and his older Sis's secretive exploits in an orphanage run by their puritanical Mother and mad scientist Father.⁴⁵ Like a pre-emptive strike upon future sorrow, Maddin's film ends with grown-up Guy reconciling with his once-monstrous Mother just before her death, realizing that he is now utterly alone as his family's last survivor, having neglected deep familial bonds over the transience of unfulfilled romantic love. The final image of Guy perched high above his family's island, either commanding his destiny or becoming impossibly vulnerable, suggests this circular tension between either an abandonment or rediscovery of whatever is held most important. He appears confronted with a choice—whether to push ahead through his grief and isolation, or to follow in the steps of so many other

Maddin protagonists and simply succumb to it—but there seems something almost hopeful on the precipice of this private apocalypse, a sure measure of inner strength. Like *Cowards*, what sets *Brand* apart from Maddin's earlier films is a deliberate drive to actively emerge from the mental fog of amnesia, reducing the circuitous pretenses for confronting the mnemonic core of his work. But the film also illustrates the double edge of that pursuit: the dangers of becoming seduced back into the far-flung territories of one's own mind. For the mature Maddin, amnesia and remembering can ultimately yield similar emotional consequences.

Hired to film a portrait of his hometown on the cusp of a planned move to Toronto, Maddin crafted a "docu-fantasia" that evokes a profoundly Canadian sense of place, serving as a heartfelt farewell to a locale so often distorted or blurred out in his work. The final film of his autobiographical trilogy, *My Winnipeg* (2007) portrays the city as a strange and mystical place populated by sleepwalkers who have forgotten their way and landmarks primed for demolition. Maddin attempts to escape town through the act of cinematically documenting its idiosyncrasies, meanwhile reconstructing his childhood experiences and studying their perpetual effects upon him. Family and civic history are metonymically linked as he deliberately tries to remember the places and events that his fellow denizens have apparently forgotten—but now his personal recollections take on a distinctly political tenor. The working-class city suffused with Maddin's memories is slowly being razed and replaced by the "low-priced newness" of corporate capitalism—a destruction of civic/cultural memory. "What if City Hall ever listened to the wishes of the people?" he wonders, invoking the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike as a shining moment of collective resistance. He imagines the city's forgotten inhabitants, such as First Nations peoples and World War I veterans, reclaiming the fleeting joys to which they are entitled. Meanwhile, "Citizen Girl," a female bastion of labour and civic union, emerges proudly upon the horizon to ensure that Winnipeg will be in good hands during Maddin's absence.

Forged at the intersection of pastiche and personal history, *My Winnipeg*, like Maddin's other films, deftly restores or recreates individual-cum-collective mythologies, marked by a populist emphasis upon emotionality and a patently artificial archaism that never lets viewers forget cinema's role in constructing cultural memory. By resurrecting past artistic styles in the form of pre-decayed artifice, he implicitly calls into question those styles' original artificiality, while at the same time celebrating their ability to both convey

and acquire meaning across time (even if the resulting cinematic fantasies ultimately fail to restore dead loves to life). Rather than merely sacralizing these neglected vessels of cultural memory in a bath of unblinking nostalgia, Maddin esteems them as raw material for a proposed democratization of affect—a means of allowing viewers to confront their class-based taste biases and, if willing, reconnect with their emotions in the face of ironic distance. The impoverished, low-budget primitiveness of his necrophilic aesthetic suggests the relative accessibility of creatively reworking the past in the present in order to express highly distinctive, and yet emotionally universal, experiences. Revaluing archaic cinema’s potential to both capture and shape modern-day experience, his unapologetic blend of high and low art employs multiple registers of authenticity and irony, and can therefore simultaneously engage and alienate audiences across class boundaries. Over the past two decades, this quality has earned Maddin a devoted following as “the most eccentric of mainstream filmmakers (or the most accessible of avant-gardists),”⁴⁶ but like the outwardly absurd practices of “bark fish cutting” and “bark fish appreciation,” his peculiar creative process remains a powerful mnemonic method for allowing the personal/cultural past to tangibly reverberate in the present, and not merely vanish as the real/reel unspools and flickers away.

* * *

As the contributors to this volume illustrate, close examination reveals sur-reptitious depths worth plumbing in the work of this eminent Canadian filmmaker. As with any collection of essays, particularly one devoted to a working filmmaker, the following perspectives represent a particular period in Maddin’s critical reception and, while obviously not intended as a final word on the subject, should hopefully provide helpful points of entry to the aesthetic, political, and personal issues at play in his work. In a nod to the collage-like qualities of Maddin’s movies, both new and previously published essays appear within these pages, sketching various lines of exploration that form a detailed image of his oeuvre and the responses it has garnered.

The difficulty of analyzing Maddin’s films is a hurdle explicitly addressed in the earliest chapters, but the authors quickly lay a fertile groundwork for discussions to follow. Against complaints that his wilful archaism and narrative extremes are little more than inscrutable gimmickry, they debate the seeming contradiction in his work between ironic form and emotional

content, finding the two aspects to be profoundly interlinked. In the first essay, Donald Masterson draws upon his own interviews with Maddin and screenwriter George Toles to explore the brotherly bonds in their working relationship. Both artists draw upon familial experiences for their proposed rehabilitation of sentiment, each having conflicted feelings about their older brothers. Fraught fraternal interactions play crucial parts in films like *Careful* and *The Saddest Music in the World*, variously inspired by Maddin's sorrow over his brother Cameron's suicide and Toles's rivalry with his brother Tom Toles, a widely renowned political cartoonist. Meanwhile, Toles's own affiliation with Maddin has gradually evolved from paternal mentor to fraternal cohort, but not without a bit of "sibling rivalry" along the way.

In a more journalistic, early assessment of Maddin's general aesthetic, originally penned shortly after the release of *Careful*, Geoff Pevere argues that Maddin depicts social forms and rituals as powerful but ridiculous in their compulsive and often cruel drive for order. The individual becomes alienated from his/her world and suffers a crisis of perception, often meeting a tragic end for following his/her instinctual desires beyond the edge of cultural prohibitions. For Pevere, the form of Maddin's archaic and degraded aesthetic negotiates the social and personal destruction portrayed on the level of narrative, highlighting how social forms, including the rituals of cinema, are already fragile and decayed—potent in their effects upon the individual and yet subject to implosion when repressed urges and fears inevitably return.

In his essay "Reinhabiting Lost Languages," Will Straw differs with Pevere, positing that a thematic analysis based upon "Canadian" repression is difficult to establish in Maddin's work, precisely because the director's greatest influences are obscure filmic styles that have very little relevance to either a Canadian literary/cinematic tradition or the Canadian lived experience. Unlike other Canadian art, Maddin seems less concerned with repudiating the colonizing influence of other cultures (such as Hollywood) than with restoring grotesque violence and sexuality to archaic genres (e.g., fairy tales, nineteenth-century melodramas). Resisting essentialist readings of "Canadianness" in his films, Straw argues that Maddin's inspirations are less national or regional than generational—a means of playfully reworking historical styles into a pastiche reflecting his generation's memories of past cinematic forms. As a result, perhaps the most Canadian quality of his work is the privileging of "lost" cinematic languages as minor and marginal as Canadian cinema itself.

For Steven Shaviro, Maddin does not so much revitalize archaic cinematic styles as empty them of their relevance, foregrounding their excessive semblance of antiquity. His films are not about restoring the past but forgetting the present; not about situating one's unrequited desires in terms of what is or was, but within the virtual realm of what might have been. Although melodrama is transformed into camp as high feelings become absurdly impossible to realize in one's present experience, the very impossibility of that realization allows the alienating effects of camp to be rendered strangely affective. In a rare appreciation of *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*, Shaviro describes Maddin's films as decadent spectacles that stimulate impressive affects but serve no functional sense of thematic expression. Visual excess does not motivate narrative excess in his work, but nevertheless allows extreme feelings to flourish beneath a thick patina of artifice.

In his chapter "Maddin and Melodrama," William Beard picks up from Shaviro, considering the tension between unironic seriousness and ironic distancing in Maddin's films. For Beard, however, Maddin's idealistic use of archaic visuals and melodramatic plots is highly functional, providing the filmmaker with narrative forms particularly suited to his preferred stories: autobiographical yarns with the emotional content magnified to grotesque extremes by a childlike naïveté. Maddin's visual excesses share the classical Hollywood melodrama's need to sublimate unspoken emotional content into an excess of style—but unlike classical melodramas, Maddin's self-consciously ironic formalism points toward the difficulty of expressing emotions in an innocent or authentic manner in a cynical postmodern age. Naive, excessive forms like archaic melodramas may allow Maddin to delve into a naive, excessive emotionality that seems strange and ridiculous to the learned adult, but this contradiction between emotion and irony reveals the more universal dilemma of how one should forcefully articulate one's feelings when certain avenues of emotional expression have been culturally closed off.

While the preceding essays are inflected by the prevalent view that Maddin's films are fundamentally postmodern, David L. Pike offers an alternate reading that downplays the role of camp and pastiche, instead stressing Maddin's lineage in the modernist aesthetics concurrent with the 1920s films from which he draws so much inspiration. Recalling many modernist writers, Maddin's childlike use of autobiography explores issues of decay and memory, glancing back toward an era in which his parents and cinema itself were still in their childhood. Pike claims that Maddin engages more with Hollywood

cinema than perhaps any other major Canadian filmmaker, associating Hollywood with childhood memory in a way that allows authentic emotion to be experienced without the distractions of ironic distanciation. Like the Dadaists and Surrealists, Maddin uses primitivism to subvert bourgeois realism, collapsing together trash and art in his invocation of avant-garde and popular culture alike. In fine modernist fashion, Maddin eschews ideologies of progress, dredging up the untapped potential of outdated styles and technologies as he intertextually dissolves class-based distinctions of aesthetic quality without appealing to the ironic slumming so commonplace in postmodern culture.

The next handful of essays examines a variety of personal and creative issues in Maddin's work, including his oft-intertwined treatment of sexuality, humour, and emotional loss. Several of these pieces are written by Maddin's long-time friends and collaborators who share intimate knowledge of the filmmaker's creative process and working methods. For example, writing with an ear to the Freudian milieu from which Maddin's work blossoms, Stephen Snyder revisits the geneses of Maddin's first features, tracing them back to long days of watching movies in Snyder's living room. From Buñuel, Maddin inherited a belief that sexual anticipation can produce far more imaginative energies than the actual consummation of desire. Perpetually reinvented, the individual is lost in his or her own self-images, and in the obscure objects of desire that must always evade one's grasp. Outrageous fantasies of limitless male desire merely spawn limitless castration anxieties—but sexuality's role as a transition into adulthood is never fulfilled in his films. For example, sexual inadequacy becomes represented as disease in *Tales from the Gimli Hospital*, while romantic dispossession of oneself finds expression in the multiple amnesias of *Archangel*. As if filming in Lacanian terms, Maddin's syndromic depictions of sexuality are undergirded by an inability to use language for representing self-identity, alienating the individual from him/herself and others.

In the next essay, Carl Matheson addresses the difficulty that many viewers have in narratologically interpreting or emotionally connecting with Maddin's work. Comparing earlier films like *Archangel* to Maddin's more recent, increasingly autobiographical output, Matheson discusses the push and pull between immediacy and distance in the filmmaker's oeuvre as more applicable to the processes of dreamwork than to standard cinematic narratives. While the distortions and exaggerations found in dreams and

nightmares account for the defamiliarizing effects of Maddin's aesthetic, the recurrent themes of incest, and the wildly exaggerated character types, those same qualities also reveal the obsessive emotions and deep, irresolvable pain at the heart of (almost all) his movies.

Moving from dreams to fairy tales, George Toles addresses his creative partnership with Maddin in the following essay, "From Archangel to Mandragora in Your Own Backyard: Collaborating with Guy Maddin," providing valuable insight into their respective writing processes. Fairy tale structures may allow them to rework certain autobiographical issues (though not in a wholly "safe" way), extending the discomfiting sense of moral twilight and artistic ambiguity so pervasive in their work. Maddin and Toles do not presuppose a position of ethical superiority over their characters, instead sharing in their creations' fears and torments. Comedy often springs from horrible situations in their films, ultimately reinforcing pain and making laughter a potential source of shame. Because fairy tales magically renew the sensation of being lost, one can easily forget oneself in such narratives as one's emotional investments become blurred (but not emptied of affective meaning).

Continuing on from Toles's discussion of Maddin's literary pedigree, the following chapters tighten their focus on specific films, with Milan Pribisic analyzing *Dracula: Pages From a Virgin's Diary* as a "theatre film," a hybrid filmic form that maintains a dialogic interplay between stage performance and cinema. Pribisic details the project's development and the various transcodings of the Dracula mythology that occur between Stoker's novel, Mark Godden's ballet production, and Maddin's film. By applying silent film aesthetics to ballet, Maddin blurs the lines between cinematic and theatrical audio-visual images, playing to the strengths of each medium without sacrificing the story's literary origins.

Expanding upon ideas earlier raised by Straw and Pike, Dana Cooley reads Maddin through Walter Benjamin's belief in cinema's "forgotten futures," or the radical potentials for cinematically reconstructing reality that were abandoned with the commercialization of movies. Maddin makes advances in cinematic form by regressing in terms of historical practice, returning to an aesthetic of artifice and attractions. For Cooley, his films serve an allegorical function as (neo-)baroque art, foregrounding their own materiality and excess in such a way that we are forced to reconsider the artificiality of our cultural representations. As viewers, we are seduced by the tangled and

unstable arrays of meaning in his films, invited to participate in a realm of self-reflexive play. The decay of memory looms large here, allowing Maddin to create a dialogue with the past in which alternate versions of his autobiography and our collective memories are made possible.

Following the thread that Maddin's work is a cinema that "could have been," Darrell Varga's essay "Desire in Bondage" reads *Careful* through Nietzsche's writings on tragic art. Here the desiring body struggles to exceed the social discipline that prevents its fulfillment, breaking free from the cultural constraints of social realism and coherent subject positions. In the dreamlike spaces of Maddin's film, the self can be ecstatically forgotten, and the viewer provided with tragic insight into the horror and absurdity of existence. Idealistic beliefs in rationality, realism, and utilitarianism fall away when existence can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon linked to the eternal nature of Dionysian art.

Saige Walton explores *Cowards Bend the Knee* and *Brand Upon the Brain!* from a phenomenological perspective, returning to the concept of the baroque as she argues that the intertwined roles of artifice and affect in Maddin's work are not so much symptoms of camp (as Shaviro argued earlier), but rather manifestations of the baroque's presentational sensuality. Rather than searching for "authentic" emotional depths behind Maddin's stylized surfaces, we should focus upon the potential of those gestural surfaces to contain and express inner emotions, folding together inside and outside, affecting our own viewing bodies as we unconsciously recognize the gesture's meaning. The affective relations transmitted between bodies through deixis (a "pointing" via words or form) are reflected not only in the extreme expressiveness of his characters, but in the delirious movement and editing of the film surface itself, to which we instinctively respond on an emotional level.

In the concluding essay, Lee Easton and Kelly Hewson examine how Maddin queers ideas of nationality in *The Saddest Music in the World*, inventing new national mythologies while undercutting the very bases for such mythologies, especially the heterosexual nuclear family's relation to the nation-state. Maddin's characters may perversely refuse restraint within a singular (national) identity, but their nostalgic drive for a lost sense of imperialistic heteropatriarchy is doomed to failure, leaving a survival of the queerest. Unlike earlier analyses of the film, the excessive female desires of the nymphomaniac Narcissa and androgynous Lady Port-Huntley receive ample attention as refracted symbols of Canadian national identity within a

genre (the musical) wrested away from fantasies of American idealism. It is Maddin's ever-idiosyncratic ability to engage past cinematic genres and styles in such politically and aesthetically meaningful ways that makes him one of the most important Canadian filmmakers, and a subject worthy of the essays contained herein.

Notes

1. Guy Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar: Selected Writings* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2003), 187–188.
2. Guy Maddin, interview by Jeremy Smith, “Mr. Beaks gets to the root of brilliance with Guy Maddin—an absolute genius!” *Ain't It Cool News*, 30 April 2004, <http://www.aintitcool.com/node/17448>. Maddin's statement recalls Paul Willemen's suggestion that cinephilia is somehow necrophilic, in that it relates to “something that is dead, past, but alive in memory.” Paul Willemen, “Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered,” in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 227.
3. Guy Maddin, interview by Caelum Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium: The Films of Guy Maddin* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2000), 81.
4. His childhood is detailed in the autobiographical, Robert Musil-inspired film treatment *The Child Without Qualities* (written in 1992), published in Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 176–208. Many episodes from this treatment have become manifest in *Cowards Bend the Knee*, *Brand Upon the Brain!* and *My Winnipeg*.
5. “What loving and vigorous play these toys and couches had been submitted to before the CHILD WITHOUT QUALITIES had entered the world. Now, as a result, a residue of better quality seemed to sit on everything in the deserted house. The house held a dormancy, a potential to divulge what it held for his family before. Every object in it was full and ready to discharge its payload of history. The CHILD WITHOUT QUALITIES was permanently expectant. Everything seemed ready to move forward, at any moment, back into the time of its heyday.” Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 187.
6. *Ibid.*, 152.
7. Maddin, interview by David Church, “Dissecting the Branded Brain: An Interview with Guy Maddin,” *Offscreen* 10, 1 (January 2006), http://www.offscreen.com/biblio/phile/essays/branded_brain.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Maddin, interview by Marie Losier and Richard Porton, “The Pleasures of Melancholy: An Interview with Guy Maddin,” *Cineaste*, Summer 2004, 22.
10. Maddin, interviewed in Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 32.
11. “Sex is a stupid little jab of the needle, an anaesthetic that becomes, quickly, less and less effective with each application,” he writes in his journals. “But how it has worked to local effects when my grandmother, my father, and my aunt all died. One could almost surmise that sex kills loved ones, but this is no more true than a notion that anaesthetic cuts open the chest.” Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 45.
12. The Surrealists' love of primitivism was a major influence upon Maddin. “The most exciting movements in art in the last century and a half have been reactions against

- technical sophistication and have gone ‘backward’ to find honesty and truth, the essence of things,” he once explained. Guy Maddin, interview by James Quandt, “Purple Majesty: James Quandt Talks with Guy Maddin,” *Artforum International*, Summer 2003, 160.
13. Guy Maddin, interview by Mark Peranson, “Count of the Dance: Guy Maddin on *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin’s Diary*,” *Cinema Scope*, March 2002, 6–7.
 14. Guy Maddin, interview by Robert Enright, “Far From the Maddin Crowd: An Interview with Guy Maddin,” *Border Crossings*, July 1990, 39.
 15. Maddin, interviewed in Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 45. The book *Gimli Saga* (Gimli, MB: Gimli Women’s Institute, 1974), a historical chronicle of “New Iceland” compiled by a local townswomen’s guild, read like a humorous catalogue of misfortunes to Maddin, proving inspirational while writing the film.
 16. *Ibid.*, 98.
 17. He says, for example, “I like to look at certain women from the past in movies. And it’s also a matter of their inaccessibility—the keyhole stuck in the door that’s seven or eight decades thick makes them very alluring to me.” Guy Maddin, interviewed in Losier and Porton, “Pleasures of Melancholy,” 21.
 18. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Quandt, “Purple Majesty,” 159.
 19. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 87.
 20. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Quandt, “Purple Majesty,” 158.
 21. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Enright, “Far From the Maddin Crowd,” 36. Childhood remembrance stories are among his favourites.
 22. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 81.
 23. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Quandt, “Purple Majesty,” 160.
 24. According to Maddin, interview by Robert Enright, “Chicken Soup for the Stone Baby: Interrogations for an Autobiography,” in Guy Maddin, *Cowards Bend the Knee*, ed. Philip Monk (Toronto: The Power Plant, 2003), 44–45.
 25. Geoff Pevere, “Guy Maddin: True to Form,” *Take One*, Fall 1992, 9; reprinted in this volume (53). More recently, Steven Shaviro has fittingly described Maddin’s films as “hauntological,” invoking Derrida’s term for spectral traces of an ungrounded, non-originary past that persists in the present, challenging chronological historicism and ontological binaries (such as being/non-being and presence/absence). For Shaviro, Maddin “seeks to present to us the reality of the past: which is to say, not the past as it *really* was, but the past *as* past, the past as a memory, the actuality of the past as it is re-called or re-presented, rather than actually present.” Steven Shaviro, “Brand Upon the Brain!” *The Pinocchio Theory*, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=589>.
 26. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Enright, “Far From the Maddin Crowd,” 39.
 27. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 78.
 28. Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 76.
 29. “When melodrama isn’t working, I crave irony. If the sweetness isn’t working, I need something savoury, something very salty or something horrible, caustic to undermine it.” Guy Maddin, interviewed in Quandt, “Purple Majesty,” 158.
 30. Steven Shaviro, “The Life, After Death, of Postmodern Emotions,” *Criticism* 46, 1 (2004): 132. See also Shaviro’s essay in this volume.
 31. Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 109.

32. While Maddin claims that educated Westerners cannot properly recognize melodrama until it is imported, the same could be said of his own work, given how frequently US and European critics implicitly link his Canadian heritage to his films' strangely melodramatic (or just plain strange) content (Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 77). The sense of uncanny familiarity, yet apparent foreignness, of "Canadianness" in the reception of Maddin's films is perhaps linked to his nation's neurotic "Third World" status as a country perceived as neither fully American nor British. See W.J. Keith, "Third World America: Some Preliminary Considerations," in *Studies on Canadian Literature*, ed. Arnold E. Davidson (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990), 5.
33. Mark Jancovich, "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital, and the Production of Cultural Distinctions," *Cultural Studies* 16, 2 (2002): 310–311.
34. Moya Luckett, "Sexploitation as Feminine Territory: The Films of Doris Wishman," in *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, eds. Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lázaro Reboll, Julian Stringer, and Andy Willis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 154.
35. For example, Johann's severe anxieties about spying on his mother in the bath (*Careful*); or Brent Neale's character cutting himself and transforming into a woman after peering at a rival for Snjófrídur's affections (*Hospital Fragment*); or even how viewers had to crouch to view the peephole installation of *Cowards Bend the Knee*.
36. A synopsis, excerpt, and storyboards from the project were published (with an introduction by Meeka Walsh) under the title "Dikemaster's Daughter" in *Border Crossings*, Fall 1997, 34–41. An episode from *The Dykemaster's Daughter* was also filmed as the 1994 short film *Sea Beggars*.
37. Maddin, interviewed in Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 51–53 and 83.
38. According to a 1996 journal entry, in Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 21.
39. *Ibid.*, 22–23.
40. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Church, "Dissecting."
41. Guy Maddin, interview by William Beard, *Conversations with Guy Maddin* (Edmonton: Metro Cinema Society, 2007), 5–6. Reprinted in this volume (240).
42. Mark Peranson, "The Mouthwash of the Past," *The Believer*, August 2003, 51–52.
43. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Peranson, "Count of the Dance," 8.
44. Guy Maddin, interviewed in Quandt, "Purple Majesty," 205.
45. *Brand* was primarily inspired by the quarrels between Maddin's mother and teenage sister, which "seemed *really* melodramatic in everyone's sense of the word when they think of melodrama as completely uninhibited expressions of emotion. These fights had a lot of fireworks and they got pretty surreal." Guy Maddin, interviewed in Church, "Dissecting." Many smaller personal details became refracted into the story as well; for example, see Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 53–54, 194–196, 215, and 222.
46. J. Hoberman, "Kino Kink," *Village Voice*, 10 August 2004, <http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0432,hoberman,55796,20.html>. For example, Maddin's allusions to movements like Surrealism and Soviet Montage are melancholy dreams for an avant-gardism that could successfully stir the masses, not just find bourgeois admirers.