

Psychedelic Nostalgia

By Matthew Hennessey

The state of Britpop today is a little bit up in the air. It certainly dominated the airwaves for the past couple of years as the Oasis/Blur tangent gave rise to other promising, monosyllabic acts such as Pulp and Cast. Menswear, The Verve and countless others tried to wrestle for the top of the already over-saturated pop/rock genre. It seems quite apparent, as Oasis's new album doesn't appear to be as catastrophically enjoyable as their first two, that Britpop is on the decline along with Grunge and 90's Punk.

As Husker Du and the Replacements were influential at shaping the Grunge era, The Smiths had their part to play in creating a thriving Britpop scene that awakened in the 1990's. It was not a new scene (see Beatles/Stones/Zombies) but neither was Seattle. The charactered, falsetto wail of Morrissey and the brilliant pop melodicism of Johnny Marr's guitar defined the path that allowed the Gallaghers and Damon Albarn to be household names in North America.

The Smiths began creating pop sensibility in 1984 with the release of *The Smiths*. They followed up a year later with *Meat Is Murder* which thrust dark, introspective telltales into UK charts. Morrissey's lyrics and his unorthodox vocal style quickly outlined the uniqueness of The Smiths. The track, "How Soon Is Now?" has become synonymous with this British group -- hey, it's even been used on a Labatt's commercial. Marr's post new-wave approach to guitar playing is the real treat to The Smiths sound, and is sadly lacking from Morrissey's later solo projects.

Only three years after their debut, The Smiths called it quits with the release of *Strangeways, here we come* in 1987. The album produced some of the most important Smiths songs like "Stop me if you think that you've heard this one before" and "Girlfriend in a coma."

The album as a whole was not perfect; the second track, "I started something I couldn't finish" witnesses Morrissey obviously screwing up and asking co-producer Stephen Street to do the song over again. We know now that they didn't.

The Smiths were never commercially successful, but they were prolific; easily seen in their compilation *Louder than bombs* which has 24 tracks contained. They were highly influential in the 80's Britpop scene along with New Order and The Cure. Their depressing lyricism recalls the Grunge ethics of the 90's and Marr's bright guitar attack is copied in many pop groups today.

Meat Is Murder (Reprise: 1985) the headmaster ritual-rusholme ruffians-I want the one I can't have-what she said-that joke isn't funny anymore-how soon is now?-nowhere fast-well I wonder-barbarism begins at home-meat is murder

Strangeways, Here We Come (Reprise: 1987) a rush and a push and the land is ours-I started something I couldn't finish-death of a disco dancer-girlfriend in a coma-stop me if you think that you've heard this one before-last night I dreamt that somebody loved me-unhappy birthday-paint a vulgar picture-death at one's elbow-I won't share you

FOREIGN FILM REVIEW

BY DAVID MACDONALD

After having reviewed *Swept Away* last time, it was a little more pleasant to be viewing *Antonia's Line*, the Foreign Film Oscar winner of 1996. Sure, this film may not be controversial nor very profound, but at least it isn't idiotic.

The story involves four generations of women, starting with Antonia and working its way to her great-granddaughter. What seems to make these four women special is that they do things for themselves; all their choices are made to suit themselves rather than the society at large. For example, Antonia, who is a young widow at the beginning of the film, decides to start a new life when she returns to her home village to take over the old family farm after her aging mother had passed away. This independent streak penetrates into the following generations. Her daughter becomes a painter, the granddaughter becomes a teacher as well as an amateur music composer, and the great-granddaughter, even at her young age, already expresses herself in writing.

Not a whole lot happens. We see these people grow older, make choices, and live their lives, but apparently the point seems to be that ultimately one is responsible for his or her own destiny and that the rest of society cannot pass judgement on the basis of what a person is. This is apparent in the fact that Antonia has made everyone feel welcome in her home. Over the years, we see many different guests, from a married couple who both are mentally handicapped, to the local young priest who suddenly gets a change of heart about the rigid doctrines of religion.

The descendants of Antonia are also part of this ideal. Antonia's daughter, the painter, wants a child but not a husband so through a perhaps heartless deception she is able to get someone into a hotel room with her just long enough to get the job done. Also, the granddaughter, when she gets married, has a different notion of family, as it is her husband who is more enraptured by the thought of taking care of the child, its mother concentrating on more intellectual pursuits. And finally, although we only see the great-granddaughter of Antonia as a young child, we know that the family way of independence and creativity will rub off on her.

This is quite a nice movie, although nasty-minded people will say that this is just a "chick-flick" with subtitles. Could be. But I'm not going to worry too much about that.

Rating: ***

I need a catchier title for this column than "Foreign Film Review". If you can find one, write to dlmacdonald@upei.ca

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