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Y Mañana? to Manneken Pis

Thirty Years of Flemish Filmmaking



Cinema as popular entertainment

In the 1930s Belgium boasted the largest number of cinema-goers in Europe. The enormous number of cinemas and the queues at the box office were not only important for the American distribution houses, which were slowly but surely catching up with their French competitors; the Flemish interest in the cinema as a form of entertainment also stimulated the production of a series of Flemish popular films. Filmmakers such as Jan Vanderheyden, Edith Kiel and, later, Jef Bruyninckx ultimately gave the cinema-going public what they wanted: comic films, and in their own language at that – usually a somewhat watered-down version of the Antwerp dialect. A Flemish classic from this period was *Whitey* (De Witte, 1934), based on the widely read novel of the same name by the regional writer Ernest Claes. The film owed its unequalled success above all to the acting performance of Jef Bruyninckx, who portrayed the pranks of a fourteen-year-old country boy in an uncannily natural way.

In 1952 the Belgian government began subsidising the domestic film industry for the first time. The subsidy took the form of the repayment of a percentage of the entertainment tax levied on commercial performances. This encouraged three young film freaks, Rik Kuypers, Roland Verhavert and Ivo Michiels, to work together to produce a ‘different’ film; inspired by the British Free Cinema, their psychological drama *Seagulls Die in the Harbour* (Meeuwen sterven in de haven, 1955) presented a stark contrast to the banality of the amateurish farce films of the day. Their efforts brought artistic success (including nomination in the Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival), but were ignored by the public. The result was a stagnation in the development of a domestic film industry.

Eventually the government realised that the film industry needed more than the ‘detaxation system’ of 1952. After an unsuccessful attempt to establish a National Belgian Film Institute, Belgium’s two language communities, which by now had become ‘culturally’ autonomous, each went their own way. On 10 November 1964 a Royal Decree was issued founding a Selection Committee for Dutch-language Cultural Films (Belgium).

Before this attempt to create some sort of film policy had any effect, however, the premiere took place in 1966 of *The Man Who Had his Hair Cut*



Emile Degelin. *Y Mañana?*
(1966)(Photo by J.C.
Boon).

Short (De man die zijn haar kort liet knippen), based on the novel of the same name by Johan Daisne. This production, which was made especially for television, gave André Delvaux a chance to demonstrate his talent for film. The filming of this important magic-realistic novel was initially heavily criticised in its own country but highly praised abroad. The renowned Parisian film journal *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* regarded Delvaux' film as quite simply a masterpiece. The modernist structure, with a well thought-out combination of sound and image and the magnificent performance of Senne Rouffaer in the role of the teacher-cum-lawyer who is destroyed by an impossible love, turned this into a film which still stands the test of time today. The lack of recognition at home, combined with the better production facilities in the French-speaking region of Belgium, caused Delvaux to turn his back on Flanders. He built up his film career with a number of more than serviceable French-language productions, including *Un soir, un train* (1967), *Rendez-vous à Bray* (1971), *Benvenuta* (1983), en *L'Oeuvre au noir* (1988). It was not until 1979 that he again completed a Flemish film. *A Woman in a Twilight Garden* (Een Vrouw tussen Hond en Wolf).

Underlying the subsidy policy which came into effect in 1965 was a desire to help the Flemish film industry out of the doldrums. The financial resources were minimal, however, and the government therefore sought to encourage co-productions with the Netherlands.

The first film produced with government support was *Y Mañana?* (Emile Degelin, 1966), a comic production full of visual gags in the Jacques Tati style. This story about a Flemish policeman (French actor Jacques Dufilho) who is prevented by all manner of complications from leaving the Spanish island where he has been spending a holiday, has three different 'endings', from which the cinema-goer him or herself has to choose. With *Cash? Cash!* (1967) Paul Collet and Pierre Drouot, both newly qualified producers, created a smoothly edited and cleverly portrayed thriller. Of these two films only the latter, which was aimed at young people, achieved box office success.

This was far from the case with the most important production of this early period. Harry Kümel's first full-length film *Monsieur Hawarden* (1968), based on the novel of that name by the Flemish author Filip de Pillecijn, was a genuinely remarkable work. Based on a script by the Dutchman Jan Blokker, who adapted the novel for the screen, the young Kümel managed to produce a film which is able to serve as a model for the artistically valid translation of literary work for the cinema. The dramatic story of transvestism, based on authentic details, about a noblewoman pursued for murder by the legal system, allowed the filmmaker to portray all manner of erotic relations in a subtle, ambiguous and highly stylised way. Initially cinema proprietors refused to show the film, and in the Netherlands the production also met with a negative response from the public. Finally, there was a repeat of what had happened with Delvaux' *The Man Who had his Hair Cut Short*: Kümel's debut won awards at the film festivals in Hyères, Chicago and Edinburgh and then returned to its own country where it found recognition, especially among film buffs.

The box office success of *Mira*

And then, in 1971, the Dutch-Belgian co-production *Mira* suddenly burst into the cinema to great plaudits as a 'Flemish film'. At last filmmakers had succeeded, 37 years after Vanderheyden's *Whitey*, in bringing the masses back to the cinema. *Mira*, the film version of the well-known novel *The Demise of Waterhoek* (De telcurgang van de Waterhoek – written by Stijn Streuvels in 1927) by the Dutchman Fons Rademakers, did indeed have everything necessary to charm the public at large: a script with sufficient dramatic tension, a love story portrayed by popular actors such as Willeke van Amelrooy and Jan Decleir and the beautiful colour photography of Eddy van der Enden, who evoked the picturesque life and setting of 'poor Flanders' in the manner of a folklore dream. Within the story of a farming community which sets its face in vain against modernisation, a tragic love affair develops between a naive farmer's son and a promiscuous woman.

It seemed as if the commercial success of *Mira* had set the Flemish film industry on its way – especially since even the French-speaking cinema-going public of Brussels had been charmed by a Dutch-language 'Belgian' film. In retrospect, the success of *Mira* proved to be a mirage. The film did however start a trend which shaped a substantial section of the Flemish film industry. From then on, producers, filmmakers and the Selection Committee sought to appeal to the public through the filming of well-known literary works.

Following in the footsteps of *Mira*, two films appeared almost simultaneously in 1972: *Rolande – A Story of Passion* (Rolande met de bles) by Roland Verhavert, based on the novel by Herman Teirlinck, and *Louisa – A Word of Love* (Louisa – een woord van liefde) by the young, commercially-minded duo Paul Collet and Pierre Drouot. Neither film achieved the box-office success of their predecessor, though *Rolande*, in particular, was more interesting, both in terms of its theme and its structure. In addition to having



Fons Rademakers, *Mira* (1971) (Photo Kunst & Kino).

a girl's name in their titles, all three films had in common that their stories are set in the recent past (the start of the twentieth century for *Mira*, during and after the First World War for *Rolande* and *Louisa*), and therefore focus particular attention on the external beauty of the costumes and the emphatically aesthetic nature of the camerawork – a technique which cannot be entirely absolved of the charge of 'Schönfilmerei', to which the carefully sought-out locations of castle grounds, rural settings and old urban neighbourhoods with their attractive merchant houses lend themselves. As with Rademakers, the dramatic tension in Verhavert's and Collet-Drouot's work is based on a conflict between the old rural mentality and the modern spirit with its new views on morals and values. In *Mira* the love story between the farmer's son Sander and the promiscuous Mira runs parallel with the struggle by the rural population against the building of a bridge which will link their hamlet to the town. In *Rolande* the country squire Renier (again Jan Declerck) falls victim to his passion for the unattainable, equally promiscuous Rolande. *Louisa*, based on an original script, recounts the collapse of an idyllic 'ménage à trois', which is not tolerated by the hypocritical rural community. The weakness of Verhavert's highly stylised and technically very competent film lies chiefly in the overly literary treatment of Teirlinck's epistolary novel. The problem is compounded by the rather 'stagey' performance of many actors who were unable to shake off their theatrical origins.

Further along the literary path ...

The preference for the filmed literature genre continued for years, explaining why many Flemish films bear the names of the often traditional literary works on which their scripts are based. These included, among others, the films *The Conscript* (De loteling) and *Pallieter* (Roland Verhavert, 1973 and 1975), *Whitey* (De Witte van Sichem, Robbe de Hert, 1980), *Flaxfield* (De Vlaschaard, Jan Gruyaert, 1983), *The Lion of Flanders* (De Leeuw van Vlaanderen, Hugo Claus, 1984), *The Van Paemel Family* (Het Gezin van Paemel, Paul Cammernans, 1986) and *Farmer's Song* (Boerenpsalm, Roland Verhavert, 1989).

Perfectly good films which looked back less nostalgically at the past included *Friday* (Vrijdag, 1980) and the non-subsidised film *The Sacrament* (Het sacrament, 1989), for which filmmaker Hugo Claus took his own literary work as a basis. The film *A Woman in a Twilight Garden* (1979) by André Delvaux, the maker of *The Man Who Had his Hair Cut Short*, was a striking instance of the relationship between film and literature.

In the mid-seventies the government encouraged collaboration between Flemish novelists and filmmakers. Funds were provided, for example, to enable the filmmaker André Delvaux to collaborate with the author and scriptwriter Ivo Michiels. Both set to work to create a story in which the central figure is Lieve (the French actress Marie-Christine Barrault), a petit-bourgeois woman who lives through the German occupation of Brussels during the Second World War, the Liberation and the ensuing repression, and who becomes worldly wise through her relationship with two men. This *tranche de vie* covering around fifteen years is made up of three parts: Lieve's marriage to Adriaan (Rutger Hauer), who later leaves for the Eastern Front in the service of the German occupier, her acquaintance with François (Roger Van Hool), a resistance fighter who hides in her home, and

finally the return of Adriaan, from whom Lieve becomes increasingly alienated as he neurotically clings to his outmoded ideals. Finally, Lieve rejects both men and opts for an independent existence with her small son.

Michiels developed this plot in such a stylised manner that the script became a film novel in its own right. It appeared as a book in 1977 under the title *A Twilight Garden* (*Een tuin tussen hond en wolf*). In 1979 the film appeared in the cinema with the slightly amended title *A Woman in a Twilight Garden*; it is interesting not only because it was the first film about collaboration, resistance and repression in Belgium during and after the Second World War. As an intimate portrait of a woman, which depicts everyday, interiorised fascism within a man-woman relationship, it is also one of the best productions in thirty years of Flemish film history. Delvaux managed to structure his film and compose it both visually and musically in such a way that he immediately left his Flemish colleagues, who often worked in an overly illustrative way, far behind. This is due above all to his visual / pictorial style and his insight into the possibilities and functionality of the language of film. As a Belgo-French co-production, *A Woman in a Twilight Garden* was nominated in the Official Selection of the Cannes Film Festival, but was not a commercial success; it may have been too aesthetically constructed to engage the emotions of the public.



The engagement of Fugitive Cinema

A number of young film fanatics, such as Robbe de Hert, saw in the subsidies policy begun in 1964 opportunities for an original and personal film industry. The 22-year-old De Hert and a few friends founded the film collective *Fugitive Cinema* on 17 March 1966. This group of film freaks had no shortage of original film projects. They quickly set themselves apart with a series of short films and reportages, which brought in one international prize after another. Together with Guido Henderickx and Patrick Le Bon, De Hert was to give the Flemish film industry a new dimension.

The first full-length fictional film from Robbe de Hert was *Camera Sutra* (1970-1973), in which he deliberately broke through the classical narrative style. It is a typical montage film. The documentary fragments rant in polemic style against the Flanders of the time, where the establishment maintains 'order' and where 'culture' functions as a sweetener, among other things in the form of cycle racing and beer festivals. The lack of power to change this situation is reflected in the ironic / aloof filming of the fictional part, in which a group of young rebels unsuccessfully attempt to steal weapons from a munitions store. In essence the film is a post-1968 cry of despair by a powerless angry young man. Once again, the positive reception at domestic and foreign film festivals was in sharp contrast to the film's distribution and reception in domestic cinemas. After this, De Hert returned to documentaries with the long reportage *Le Fillet Américain* (1978-1980).

Completing these two films had however brought Flanders' only film collective into severe financial difficulties. De Hert, Henderickx and Le Bon had no choice but to enter the commercial film industry if they wished to continue working as filmmakers. For De Hert this meant showing the film *Whitey* (1980) referred to earlier, a remake of Vanderheyden's cinema success from 1934. The box office success of the film led to a commission from the Belgian broadcaster BRTN – almost inevitably for the filming of a Flemish novel. De Hert accepted the proposition and created *Maria*



André Delvaux, *A Woman in a Twilight Garden* (Len Vrouw tussen Hond en Wolf, 1979) (Photo Film Film).

Guido Henderickx, *Burnt Bridge* (Verbrande brug, 1975).

Danneels or the Life that We Dreamed (Maria Danneels of het leven dat wij droomden, 1982), based on the work of the same name by the traditional novelist Maurice Roelants, in which the author recounts how the close friendship between two women is disrupted by a smooth but superficial young man. De Hert placed the lesbian relationship, which Roelants merely hinted at in his novel, centre stage and relocated the story to the 1960s. In contrast to the novel, in which Maria (Karen van Parijs) exchanges her friendship for Irène (Arlette Weygers) for her love for Richard (Herman Gilis), in the film the lesbian love wins out over the heterosexual relationship. Filmmaker De Hert and scriptwriter Femand Auwera also added a framework story to their plot: a scriptwriter (De Hert's alter ego) treks to the TV station to negotiate on the filming of *Maria Danneels*. The process of creating the film itself was thus placed within the reworked Roelants story. The montage of image and sound, achieved among other things by inserting fragments from films such as *Casablanca*, *Psycho*, *Some Like It Hot* and *The Forty-First* (Sorok pervyl), forced the by now aging novel into oblivion. Originality, fantasy and ironising alienation, coupled with a talent for and knowledge of film, made *Maria Danneels* a unique viewing experience. It was to be the last film in which De Hert genuinely experimented with image and sound. He followed it up with a number of popular films such as *Rough Diamonds* (Zware jongens, 1984) with the Flemish comics Gaston Berghmans and Leo Martin in the main roles, *Blueberry Hill* (1989) a more or less autobiographical youth film containing a great deal of nostalgic music from the 1960s and, buoyed by the commercial success of this film, the sequel *Brylcream Boulevard* (1995). Guido Henderickx and Patrick Le Bon, too, ultimately had to comply with the laws of the film business.

In 1975, however, Guido Henderickx produced *Burnt Bridge* (Verbrande brug), which for years remained one of the most important Flemish films. Henderickx' debut in full-length films was important not only because the maker, with an aversion to the nostalgic Flemish film industry, placed the



story of a dramatic triangular relationship in a contemporary working class setting, but also because he followed American filmmakers in introducing a modern style, characterised by lingering shots – often recorded sequences – into Flemish film. With *Burnt Bridge* Henderickx confirmed the talent which he had been demonstrating since 1968 in a host of short Fugitive productions.

The work of Patrick Le Bon also initially had an authentic social dimension. This also applied to his first feature films, *Bye* (*Salut en de kost*, 1974) and *Hellhole* (*Hellegat*, 1980), which in addition to the necessary love story, dealt respectively with the themes of the exploitation of migrant labourers and damage to the environment through the dumping of chemical waste.

The fantastic cinema of Harry Kümel

With *Monsieur Hawarden* (1968) Harry Kümel had demonstrated the mannerist style which was to typify all his later films. In early 1970 he produced a commercial vampire film in a French and an English version, *Les lèvres rouges / Daughters of Darkness*, 'full of sex, blood and violence'. The four characters, a Hungarian countess, her female companion and a newly-married couple, once again have to deal with existential relationship problems. Once again semblance masks reality and once again the filmmaker plays with genres and styles, quoting among other things from Von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* (1933) and even from his own *Monsieur Hawarden*. His extremely low-budget film not only enjoyed world-wide distribution, but developed into a genuine cult film in the United States. More important, however, was *Malpertuis* (1973), based on the fantastic novel of the same title by the Ghent author Jean Ray. It is the story of the young seaman Yann (Mathieu Carrière), whose imagination becomes reality: in a building in a port city, Malpertuis, he is confronted with the demi-god Cassavius (Orson Welles), who holds gods who have been degraded to petit-bourgeois citizens in his spell. The international cast which, in addition to the names already mentioned, included Susan Hamp-

Harry Kümel, *Malpertuis* (1973) (Photo United Artists).





Harry Kümel, *Eline Vere* (1991).

shire, Michel Bouquet, Jean Pierre Cassel and others and enjoyed a very high budget for Flemish standards of the time – though actually a mere \$ 1000,000 / £ 60,000 – meant that the release of this production was awaited with great excitement. In fact making the film proved a difficult road for Kümel: there were the whims of Orson Welles, the limited acting ability of Mathieu Carrière, the Selection Committee which demanded a Dutch-language film and the cutting-room editor Richard Marden, who was no match for Kümel's vision, but who was imposed on the production by United Artists. The result was that *Malpertuis* never became what its maker had expected of it, in spite of the strong direction, luxurious scenery and splendid camerawork of Gerry Fisher. The film made it to the Cannes Film Festival, but only years later would it receive recognition.

In 1978 Kümel succeeded in completing another full-length feature film, *Paradise Lost* (*Het verloren paradijs*). As a result of this controversial production, it was years before Kümel again attracted interest. With *The Secrets of Love* (1985), an amusing erotic popular film, however, he once more gained the confidence of the financial backers for one of his long-cherished projects, the filming of Louis Couperus' novel *Eline Vere*, a masterpiece of Dutch naturalism.

Eline Vere (1991) meant a grandiose comeback for Harry Kümel. The title character (the French-speaking actress Marianne Basler) is a young woman suffocating in the mediocrity of the strict conventions and external pseudo-well-being of her bourgeois environment. The psycho-dramatic plot, which ends with Eline's suicide, gave Kümel an opportunity to evoke the *fin de siècle* life of The Hague and Brussels in all its semblance of glory. The perfectionist *mise en scène* with its splendid sets, interiors and locations, the first-class direction of the international cast, the wonderful camerawork of Eduard van der Enden and the strongly romantic music create an impressive piece of theatre, in which the mask of glitter and glamour hides the development of the existential tragedy of the lonely Eline Vere. The operatic style *à la* Visconti gives this luxuriant costume drama an added and individual dimension.



A new generation

In 1979, seminars in film scriptwriting were organised for the first time; they were taught by experts from the American Film Institute. One of the first participants was Marc Didden, a former journalist who in 1980 hit the heights with his script *Brussels by Night*. In 1983 the film appeared in the cinema. It seemed as if the Flemish film industry had acquired a new elan; for the first time, cinema-goers were introduced to a dynamic and authentic picture of life in the European capital. Max (François Beukelaers) leaves his house after a failed suicide attempt. Whilst wandering aimlessly through contemporary Brussels he meets a succession of characters: his retired workmate Louis (Michel Mentens), the barmaid Alice (Ingrid Devos) and her boyfriend, the Moroccan Abdel (Amid Chakir). The group cling to each other like outcasts. Max, however, drags the other three along on a purposeless journey which leads inexorably to a dramatic finale. A highly original script, a universal contemporary problem, an atmospheric *mise en scène*, multilingual dialogue, brilliant acting performances and direction all combined to make Didden's film debut a milestone in the history of Flemish film production. *Brussels by Night* was widely distributed and appealed in particular to young people. Didden's second film, *Istanbul* (1985), like his later films also based on an original script, was not quite able to live up to his brilliant debut.

Following in the footsteps of Marc Didden, two young filmmakers unexpectedly gave the Flemish film industry an international dimension: Dominique Deruddere (see *The Low Countries* 1995-96: 276) and Stijn Coninx (see *The Low Countries* 1993-94: 275). The latter won an Oscar nomination with his film *Daens* (1992), based on the novel *Pieter Daens* (1971) by the Flemish author Louis Paul Boon. The film recounts a dramatic period in the life of the socially committed priest Adolf Daens (once again played by a brilliant Jan Decleir), who at the end of the nineteenth century took up the cause of the exploited working classes in Aalst. The priest, after whom the *Christian Peoples' Party* founded in 1893 was named, was later forced to give up his political career. In 1899 he was even forbidden to wear the priestly cloth.

Daens had a well-structured plot. The almost documentary sequences showing the working and living conditions of the working classes in late nineteenth-century Flanders, the central plot about the emotionally loaded conflict between Daens and his astute reactionary opponent Charles Woeste, Chairman of the Catholic Party, and the confrontation of spirituality with the 'case' that was Daens were skilfully combined by Ludo Troch. The film was further enhanced by the controlled colour photography of the highly regarded Walther vanden Ende. Above all, however, it was the masterly direction of the actors by Stijn Coninx which made *Daens* such a gripping popular film. He found suitable locations in Poland and inspired the entire film crew to turn in exceptional performances. Jan Decleir, for years one of the most important stage and film actors, put in a more than convincing performance as the rebellious priest. The same also goes for the French actor Gérard Desarthe (Charles Woeste), Julien Schoenaerts (Mgr. Stillemans, Bishop of Ghent), the debutante Antje de Boeck and the more experienced, young and talented Michael Pas, who as the young 'daensist' and the Ghent socialist, respectively, portray the 'love story' within the drama which is *Daens*.



Marc Didden, *Brussels by Night* (1983).

International ambitions

The work of Dominique Deruddere is of a very different ilk. Deruddere belongs to a new generation of young people who identify with the Western counter-culture with which they came into contact through Anglo-Saxon pop and rock music and literature. It is therefore no coincidence that Dominique Deruddere's first full-length feature film *Crazy Love* (1987) was inspired by the work of the American poet and novelist Charles Bukowski. *Crazy Love* consists of three short films which portray the life of the same main character, Harry Voss, a man who hankers after love and affection. With the help of a striking musical backdrop, Deruddere transformed the raw Bukowskian world into an intimist poetic event.

In reading Bukowski, Deruddere came into contact with the work of another American author, John Fante. In this author's first novel *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, Deruddere saw possibilities for a new film project. International acclaim for *Crazy Love* and the Fante revival which Bukowski had set in motion enabled Deruddere, in collaboration with Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope Studios, to mount a major international co-production between Belgium, France and Italy. Never before had a Flemish filmmaker been given such an opportunity.

Wait Until Spring, Bandini (1989) is a melodramatic chronicle of an



Dominique Deruddere.
Crazy Love (1987).

Dominique Deruddere.
Wait until Spring, Bandini
(1989).



Frank van Passel,
Manneken Pis (1995).

Italian family which goes through a particularly hard time during the severe winter of 1925. It is a Christmas tale of poverty, love and disloyalty, portrayed by actors such as Ornella Mutti, Joe Mantegna and Faye Dunaway. Deruddere adeptly breaks through the sentimentality of the melodrama by incorporating a lightly ironic undertone. The authentic interpretation by all the actors, particularly the three children, once again proved his talent as a director. Moreover, all the technical resources such as camera-work, sets and sound are so effectively used that what is a fairly unremarkable story in terms of content makes a deep impression on the viewer. In short Deruddere, with his taste for perfection and his talent, succeeded in creating a film which fitted in perfectly with American norms. The same can be said of the technical aspects, the aestheticising of poverty and the Hollywood preference for the traditional, melodramatic happy ending.

In contrast to its success in Deruddere's home country, where the work of this 'miracle child of Flemish film' received praise from all quarters, *Bandini* failed to make the commercial cinema circuit in the United States. It may be that its penetrating, subtle characterisation and controlled plot movement made the film too European for the American market.

It was to be five years before this talented filmmaker was again able to create a feature film. Deruddere became fascinated by a script by Charles Highson and Lise Mayer, both of whom worked for British television. Again, Deruddere opted for an international co-production involving Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain and France. The result, *Suite 16* (1994) was a Pinterian '*Kammerspiel*' with two central characters: a young Dutchman, Chris (Anthonie Kamerling), who is seeking his fortune as a gigolo on the French Riviera (Nice) and an older, rich, handicapped intellectual, Glover (the English actor Peter Postlethwaite). The power struggle between these two characters is merciless, with first one and then the other appearing to gain the edge. *Suite 16* is a contemporary English-language European film, which in addition to the ubiquitous commercial ingredients contains a penetrating, merciless – and thus not particularly cheering – analysis of the human condition. Its psychological message, embedded in a

brilliant cinematic style, indisputably confirms the talent of a new generation.

**The artistic and
commercial
success of
*Manneken Pis***

Frank van Passel also displayed a talent for film in his first full-length feature film *Manneken Pis* (1995), an extremely low-budget production (see *The Low Countries* 1996-97: 273). It is an unpretentious love story about the naive and honest orphan Harry (Frank Vercruyssen), who earns his living as a dishwasher in a big city, and the tram-driver Jeanne (the ex-*Daens* actress Antje de Boeck), who is not lacking in erotic experience and is a little too passionate for Harry. When, after a great many hesitations on the part of Harry and several provocations by the girl, the two find each other, fate takes over. More important than the slightly simplistic plot is the way in which the director is able to push his actors into remarkably spontaneous performances whilst engaging the viewer with a modern suggestive, sometimes slightly poetic / nostalgic and slightly surreal film style. Van Passel's little film achieved surprising success among the cinema-going public and received plaudits at a host of international festivals (First Prize from 'La Semaine de la Critique' and 'Prix Jeunesse' at the Cannes Film Festival in 1995, as well as in Montreal, Chicago, Valladolid and Geneva).

The artistic and commercial success of the unpretentious *Manneken Pis* is indirectly the result of 30 years of subsidies policy. However imperfect, however limited and however bureaucratic this film policy was, it still offered a great many producers and filmmakers the opportunity to create films. This does not alter the fact, however, that right up to today there is still no continuous film production. If there is any continuity at all, then it lies much more in the fact that, until Marc Didden's *Brussels by Night*, the same directors' names cropped up time and again. Until 1983, the image of Flemish film was shaped above all by Roland Verhavert, Harry Kümel, Robbe de Hert, Guido Henderickx, Patrick Le Bon and Hugo Claus. Their personality and vision led to four genres: the pastoral film based on a well-known novel from Flemish literature; the socially aware contemporary 'working class film'; the surreal poetic film, to which the recent *Manneken Pis* belongs; and the comic popular film, which serious filmmakers had to produce in order to put food in their mouths.

Through all the setbacks and obstacles, Flanders continued to produce films, driven by the praiseworthy determination of the filmmakers who developed their talent in spite of the limited production and distribution opportunities. Often with an aversion to commercial considerations, they managed to produce a number of striking productions which, if there is any justice, will be able to count on growing appreciation in the future.

WIM DE POORTER

Translated by Julian Ross.