

## Book / video reviews

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**Alanis Obomsawin: The Vision of a Native Filmmaker.** Randolph Lewis. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006; illustrations; xxvi + 260 pages; ISBN 0-8032-8045-9; \$21.95US (paper)

Alanis Obomsawin has carved out a significant place for herself in Canadian cinema, from her early days as a consultant and director of short films to her current position as director of major documentary works, notably *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993). A behind-the-barricades account of the Oka crisis of 1989-90, in which Mohawk warriors stood off the Canadian military over a land-rights dispute, the feature-length documentary garnered awards in film festivals around the world and is now a canonical text in studies of Canadian cinema.

Obomsawin was raised in an Abenaki village near Montreal. She knew anti-Native prejudice as well as her own traditions from early on and as a beautiful and talented young woman she began a career as a folk-singer and story-teller. She soon became ensconced in the 1960s Montreal art scene, where Leonard Cohen's revolutionary novel, *Beautiful Losers* (1966), modeled the motif of Mohawk Saint Takawitha on Obomsawin's childhood memories and adult personality. When the National Film Board (NFB) embarked on a documentary to be filmed on a remote native reserve, they called her in as consultant. As the first Native person on staff at the NFB, it was a while before she got to move behind the camera. When she did, it was for a short film, *Christmas at Moose Factory* (1971), an animated short based on children's drawings of reservation life. Obomsawin never looked back.

Lewis's book offers useful biographical details as well as historical and political contextualisations of Obomsawin's films. His writing in these accounts is journalistic and compelling, pulling no

punches about either Obomsawin's or his own political perspective. The chapter on *Kanehsatake* is especially lively and replete with well-researched information about the historical background of the dispute, analysis of media coverage, details of the Mohawk arsenal, production information about Obomsawin's institutional struggles with the NFB and her acts of courage (she endured near-battle conditions for seventy-eight days behind the lines). The chapter also offers a detailed reading of the film that acknowledges previous scholarship and assesses subsequent reception.

Where the book falls apart is in Lewis's forays into theoretical analysis. His chapter on "A Gendered Gaze?" examines the few films Obomsawin directed in which she dealt specifically with women as subjects (*Mother of Many Children*, 1977; *My Name is Kahentiosta*, 1996) and he deals only in the antiquated discourse of simple stereotypes. Why is the masculine subject not examined? Why is gender not brought to bear on all of her work? Or why at all? If she were male, would this be an issue?

Nevertheless, this is a work of located scholarship, and - more crucially - the first book-length study of the work of a pre-eminent Canadian filmmaker.

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**Still Going Strong.** Janet Amalia Weinberg. Binghamton, New York: The Haworth Press, 2006; xviii + 293 pages; ISBN 0-7890-2871-9; \$22.95US (paper).

Janet Amalia Weinberg's edited collection *Still Going Strong* is a spirited work comprised of memoirs, stories and poems about uniquely talented mature women. Women's strengths, challenges and joys are the major themes in this book, functioning to offset the demeaning