

# INTERVIEW

With a negative pick-up from *United Artists Cross Country*, Paul Lynch's latest feature awaiting release, would seem to be a filmmaker's dream come true. Yet the case of Paul Lynch is not without a profound ambivalence: few Canadian directors have travelled from the critical esteem accorded *The Hard Part Begins* (1973) to the contempt of the reviews for *Humongous* (1982). As John Harkness wrote of *Humongous* in this magazine: "every time you think the Canadian film industry has hit rock bottom, something comes along to prove not only that it could get worse, but it already has."

For Lynch, who leaves critics to their opinions, the focus has been on the day-to-day reality of "keeping an industry rolling." But his own career itself eloquently bespeaks the nature of that roller-coaster. The interview, conducted by Connie Tadros in Montreal took place late September, 1982.



photos: Lois Siegel

## Paul Lynch

### Working-class hero

by Connie Tadros

**Paul Lynch:** When I started out, the CBC was the backbone of independent filmmaking. You used to be able to walk into the CBC with an idea, and they would give you money and encouragement, and teach you how to make films. Now that door is locked, and I think it's unfortunate because they used to have so many series that you could work for, dramas and documentary alike.

**Cinema Canada:** How much work did you do there?

**Paul Lynch:** I think I did 35 films: several 15-minute films, half-hour films, documentaries for "Telescope," for "Gallery," docu-dramas for the school and youth department. In those days, they would give me \$10,000 and I would go out and hire a writer. They would let me go and make my film, and the only time the producers came in was to see the cut. They would change this or that, and then it was finished. And along the way they would be helpful.

I started out at 20 as an art director and a graphic designer, and splurged my savings (\$700) on a 12-minute film. I took it to Glen Sarty at the CBC after I had spent \$900 on it and he gave me \$700 to finish it. And as a result, I had a legitimate, finished film to show. That was wonderful! I marched from there to the religious programming division and did a half-hour film on a home for retarded young boys. You'd go in with an idea, they would give you the money and send you away, and you'd make a film.

From the day I started at the CBC, filmmaking was a profit-making business for me. On my first film I lost \$100 and that was the last time I lost a cent making a movie. But more important, they told you how to make films. It wasn't like going to school...

**Cinema Canada:** Was your training in graphic arts or was that something you just picked up?

**Paul Lynch:** Well, I had very little schooling. I started as a cartoonist at the Toronto Star when I was 15 and then did a couple of years as a newspaper photographer around Ontario. That led into working as a magazine photographer for Maclean's and the Star Weekly and Toronto Life. I was doing quite well as a cartoonist and photographer, but I decided that neither one had much of a future because, in those days, what I wanted to do was photo-journalism for Local Life and I was doing photo-journalism for the Star Weekly and Weekend Magazine. But it really didn't have much of a future; magazines were closing down so I decided that, since I was a cartoonist, the next best step would be to be an artist, so I sort of went and applied for art jobs around Toronto and one led to the other and I ended as an art director, which I quite enjoyed.

What it was was a combination of photography, graphic design and typography and along the way I just learned, had the luck - touch wood - of meeting a lot of good people.

I ended up working for Toronto Life and while I was there I did a story for The Canadian magazine on teen-age married couples and I thought it was a pretty good story. So I went out and found another couple who were even younger - 16 and 17 - and decided I'd make a film out of it. There was a stills photographer I was working with, David Street at Toronto Life, and he was interested, so we got together and I got the money for the film and went out and shot it.

We shot week-ends for four months and I was so thrilled by it that I thought, 'I don't need graphic design anymore; I will finish this film and I will go out with it and I will be a major success!' It didn't quite turn out this way. In the course of doing it, I was working freelance in the

night for a teen-age magazine and I had all these cans of films sitting there and wondering what I would do with them.

While I was working at the teen-age magazine, the editor brought in a guy called Bill Gray and said 'this is Bill Gray and he's going to do some columns for us, so I feel you should meet him.' So we were sitting around chatting and I said 'What do you do?' and he said he edited promos for CTV. 'Like editing films?' He said 'yes.' I said 'I think I should buy you dinner.' So I bought him dinner and I said, 'I have all these cans of films.' At the time he was free-lance or unemployed. I asked him if he would like to edit so he said, 'Why not? I haven't got anything else to do.' I would borrow editing rooms from commercial places and we would go in and edit.

And slowly my epic 19-minute film on teen-age marriage got cut to twelve minutes and we sold it and that started the association with Bill Gray, which dates back from day one. Through the CBC providing the money, and people who worked at it, cameramen, people like that, providing the insight and Bill Gray editing, they took me to become a filmmaker. And I will always be glad and thankful for the CBC for that; I got them as they were on their last legs, when the CBC was still an open door. You could start with a 12-minute documentary and work your way up to a half-hour or one-hour documentary. Three years after I'd started working for them, for no known reason, they decided to find new directors in drama. The drama department was next to "Telescope" and as soon as I heard it, I wandered over and they started to give me a drama series. There were four of us...

**Cinema Canada:** You were in documentary before?

**Paul Lynch:** Yes, there was one docu-drama I did for Schools and Youth, *Little Indian Boy*, a good true story, a very nice little film about this little boy who was taken from the reservation and sent to a government school. He runs away from the school and on his way to the reservation he freezes to death. I'd done that one as a docu-drama; that and a few Telescopes started me on CBC drama.

**Cinema Canada:** How did you make the jump to your own first feature film? I presume *The Hard Part Begins* was your first independent film?

**Paul Lynch:** In the course of my free-lancing as a filmmaker, I also worked as a freelance graphic designer and one of my clients was a magazine called Toronto Calendar. I had been with them since the conception of the magazine and I got a call from them about going down to do a promo piece for some advertising program. They told me I would have to make it, the sales exec was going to write it. So I said, fine, so we met in his office and he turned out to be John

Hunter. He had been writing for the CBC on preceding occasions but things had just not gone well in his personal life and he was just working as a salesman for Calendar. After working on this promo a little bit I sort of knew his name; I didn't know from where but because I have all sorts of collectable stuff, I went to my collection of stuff on film. I found a little article out of the TV Guide where John Hunter and Martyn Burke were in a picture with David Peddy from the CBC; they were working on a drama together. I looked at the picture and I thought, 'that looks like John, it has to be John Hunter.'

So I went back and I said, 'Do you write dramas?' And he said, 'Yes, I used to for the CBC.' So I said, 'I would like to make a film; why don't we get together?' So again, John sort of was interested in making a film, and didn't have much else to do. We got together and I said, 'I'd like to do something with country music' and he said, 'I'd like to do this picture about a guy.' We combined the ideas and we worked on it for six or seven months and then, in partnership with Derrett Lee, put the package together - a very good package with letters from everybody, with a budget, everything. We took the package and a copy of the CBC films I'd made to the CFDC and they said, 'we'll give you \$60,000 if you can raise \$40,000.' Well, that was better than nothing but not exactly what one hoped. While all this was going on, I had been out on the East coast shooting a film for a CBC drama series. One of the actors was called Ratch Wallace. Back in Toronto, I ran into Ratch.

He was trying to package a picture for \$200,000 for which he had been able to round up \$100,000 but the CFDC, who was going to give him the other hundred, had turned him down. So I said: 'Let's have lunch,' and at lunch I said, 'Look, why don't you come in with me on *Hard Part* with your money and be executive producer, because you're not going to get your other \$100,000 and all I need is \$40,000.' So Ratch introduced me to his lawyer and they had indeed raised \$100,000 and he was willing to come in with the \$40,000. So now I had Ratch's money for the \$40,000 and the CFDC's for the \$60,000 and a deal was signed and we went off and did *Hard Part*.

**Cinema Canada:** *What do you feel today about the reception that *Hard Part* got? Both critically and commercially?*

**Paul Lynch:** Well, it's hard to say because I really liked it a lot. I still like the film a lot. It has rough edges because it was made with very little money and great duress, and a lot of inexperience was in it. But I think that what motivated whatever critical success it had was that it was a real movie. It was almost a documentary look at what happens to a country and western singer and most of it was accurate. Nothing was really phoney except maybe a little melodrama in the story. But, basically, everything about it is very much how those people live and that was because John and I talked to several of them. The greatest success of the picture - as much as it helped John and myself and Donnelly Rhodes - was Cliff Carroll who was a country and western singer.

Just in telling stories about films and why it's kind of a nice business, I was living in a communal house in Toronto and we were working on the script and putting the package together and I was in charge - we had about seven people

in the house - of the occupants, the rooms, of checking them out. And a guy came in and I said, 'What do you do?' and he said he was a rock and roll player working with this little country and western band. And I said, 'What kind of a country and western band?' and he said, 'Well, the guy sounds like Hank Williams.' So I said, 'Maybe I'll come down and see where you're playing.' So he told me. I went down to the New Beresford House on Queen Street in Toronto, not the Ritz, and here was Cliff Carroll and his wife Judy, and Cliff at the time worked in a box factory and his wife worked somewhere else and every night they would perform. They were very nice people and so, a couple of days later, I brought Ratch and John and everybody else down to meet them. This was on the road, this was what *Hard Part* is all about. So they agreed that they would help us, give us some advice, consult with us and, in return, Cliff would get a spot in the movie. So the movie is made, Cliff gets his spot. Cliff comes out of it with a career and, 10 years later, he now has his own bus and they tour all over Ontario and the States.

Preceding doing the film, he was married and he would order guitars from companies and when they arrived his wife would destroy them because she didn't feel he should work every night and be a country singer, particularly with Judy singing. She was a little suspicious. Judy's husband was a linesman and he was really a nice fellow. He would have Judy press all his clothes so he could go out at night and have dates with other women, and when she argued he would punch her. So the two of them found each other as a new person and stuck together and made a terrific career for themselves out of *Hard Part*. *Hard Part* started to spurr them so now

they got a bus. And the nice thing about it was they would just go in alone; they didn't have any inside into the ropes which one may think to be a success. They were just out making the best they could and so, in a real sense, they were the winners out of *Hard Part* because John and I thought they weren't in long enough. If you have a film you can go and do something else with it. Cliff and Judy never understood this. They just knew they had been in a film and they promoted it a little bit and the upshot is six months ago I went to the Horse Shoe Tavern to see them play and see the bus. It had taken them nine years to get from the New Beresford House on Queen Street East, to the Horse Shoe on Queen Street West... a lot of travelling but they made it. And that was very nice and that's what came out of it.

**Cinema Canada:** *What kind of a commercial success did the film have?*

**Paul Lynch:** It played across Canada; it sold to several world markets; it never sold in the States; it has played at the CBC numerous times and was just re-sold last year to the CBC to invest the profit. Nine years down the road... but the private investors have been paid off - the CFDC has been paid off partially, not all - and the investors earned a profit on it. And so with the pay-TV sales, if we can turn the corner in a year or two with the pay-TV sales, either in Canada or in the States, I think it will be all clean.

**Cinema Canada:** *In talking about it, you said that it was a real film, that it was not phoney and certainly that is what I reacted to when I saw it. It was just so true, so human, even the melodrama... What kind of value did you put in those characteristics when you were*

## Feature filmography

**The Hard Part Begins** (1973), p. John Clifford Hunter, Derrett G. Lee, **dist.** Cinepix, 91 min. **col.**

**Blood and Guts** (1977), p. Peter O'Brian, **d.** Independent Pictures, 94 min. **col.**

**Prom Night** (1980), p. Peter Simpson, **dist.** Astral Films, 91 min. 35mm **col.**

**Humongous** (1981), p. Anthony Kramreither, **dist.** Astral Films **Dist.**, 93 min. 35mm **col.**

**Cross-Country** (1982), p. Pieter Kroonenburg, David Patterson, **dist.** UA, 103 min. 35mm **col.**

*making the film? What were you trying to do with the film? What did you hope from the film?*

**Paul Lynch:** It was a film about blue-collar people and from the day I started, I think because I am from a working-class English family, all the stories I ever did primarily - the magazines, the photo stories or films - were always sort of blue-collar stories. I did stories about teen-age marriage, working couples, farmers, all sorts of things, because that's where my interest lies. When I started doing films I did *Daytona*, a guy struggling, a guy with a car from Toronto, struggling to make it in Daytona. I did the wonderful bus trip from the Horse Shoe Tavern in Toronto, three days to Nashville. I was, and still am, interested and fascinated by those kinds of people and I like going to those kind of movies. So when *Hard Part* came and the idea about making a film about a country and western form of struggle to get some kind of success, realistically, it was because I was interested.

**Cinema Canada:** *What is the road that you've travelled from then till now in terms of the kind of films that you're now interested in making and the motivation for making them?*

**Paul Lynch:** I think that I simply sort of exhausted a genre in a sense and, if I didn't, other people around me did when I was doing those kind of films. When I did *Hard Part* and *Blood and Guts* there were numerous sorts of blue-collar class stories, good ones. From *Panic in Needle Park* to *Five Easy Pieces*, to all of those kinds of films that came out at the same time and it just got so that when I'd done *Blood and Guts* I had exhausted that kind of milieu. And there was only so much you could do with it and what you can say. Until the milieu tends to change and it only changes with economic conditions.

Now, there are other stories to be told. There is one I would like to do; I've been working on one about two kids and a factory closing down. But that comes out of the economic conditions of the times. When I'd finished *Blood and Guts* I was just sort of running out of...

**Cinema Canada:** *There was more to it then that though, Paul, to go from *Hard Part* from *Blood and Guts* to *Prom Night* is a very big step with a very different kind of a film...*

**Paul Lynch:** No, not really because I had finished *Blood and Guts* and was looking for another story and another



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kind of milieu to deal with. And I was really not coming up with anything. I wasn't coming up with any ideas that were generating anything at all. Whenever you finish a film you go back to square one. You then have to go out and generate another story to make into a film - or something you dream up - and it's no better and no easier today than it was then. I still prowling in book stores, in magazine stores and read every trashy newspaper in the world looking for something, to try and find a good, human story and I just hadn't come up with one and so I was kicking around.

After *Blood and Guts*, a year after it was finished, I happened to go to a party and run into Orville Fruitman, who had been the prime mover behind getting *Hard Part* distributed. He liked it and he got it distributed through Cinepix. And Orville said: 'Pierre David is making movies and he's looking for commercial movies to make.' So, after talking to Orville, a friend and I sat around thinking what we could come up with in the sense of a horror film, I mean a commercial movie. We came up with a really grotesque thing called *Don't Go See the Doctor*. And my approach from *Hard Part* on, because I'm a graphic designer, is always the old Crown International route of do-the-campaign-first because when you walk in with the campaign and the treatment, producers can see something in front of them that maybe could make money. *Blood and Guts* was the same way. So I did a poster for *Don't Go See the Doctor* and a treatment, but it was really going off the deep end; it was really bizarre, horrible, and Pierre wasn't really that interested.

**Cinema Canada:** I'm just interested in the gist of this horror, is it something that you had dealt with before, that you played around with before?

**Paul Lynch:** No, no. I was working at the time with a writer who had worked on *Blood and Guts* with me. John McBride and I were working on a script called 'Catman and the Kid.' When *Blood and Guts* was finished and looking for an idea, and what came up was circuses, carnival. Now these were not well-liked by distributors and I knew this, but I thought a good human story is something I would like to do and still would like to do. My story was about a father who was once a famous lion tamer in a circus. One night his wife isn't getting along with him and she's had too many drinks so he insists that she doesn't go into the cage with him. But she wants to, mainly because her parents are visiting her and want to see the act. She's from a wealthy family. He's from a lower-class family, and the upshot is that night the cats get her and she dies. They have a daughter, Jennifer, and the wife's parents agree not to press charges but they take Jennifer to raise.

Well, all of this affects Catman and he goes on a binge, becomes an alcoholic and ends up running away to a carnival and, ten years later, there's a notice in one of the circus papers that they are looking for him because his wife's parents had died and his daughter is in a private school and there is no more money for tuition; either she will be sent to a foster home or he can have control of her, but he has the summer with her to see if it will work. And this guy is really a wonderful guy. This guy is Rocky. Everything he does is done for the right reasons and he's quite happy doing his 'age and scale' thing and hanging out with the folks and helping people. He goes to get his daughter who

hates him with a passion. He can't do anything right. And the upshot of the story is that a lion gets loose and the immediate lion tamer gets killed and the circus, in order to survive, makes him go on. And the night he goes on, his daughter leaves, she runs away and so he goes into the cage with no hope of winning and the big finale was the daughter showing up and he whipping back the cats...

It was just a wonderful story, right? So I got development money from Wayne Fenske and Chris Dalton to write this thing. We did the script and it's a wonderful script but nobody would do it. I mean you couldn't move the script... and, strangely enough, I took it with me when I first met Peter Simpson, saying, 'Would you be interested, do you make family pictures?' He said he didn't want to make it.

So with this writer, we were sitting around and we said, 'Well, maybe we'll make a horror picture,' and we gave it all and made a horror picture. We came up with *Don't Go See the Doctor*. The ad campaign was a wonderfully grotesque doctor leaning over something with a scalpel and it said: 'What happens when your gynecologist cracks? Whatever you do, don't go see the doctor'... Anyway, Pierre was not thrilled. Strangely enough, later, he made *Visiting Hours* which is about hospitals, but at that point he didn't want to do doctor stories. So, I thought, well, where do I go to next? *Halloween* had just come out so I went to see that. At some point, the title *Prom Night* popped into my mind and I started formulating a plot. I do my poster from my premise, do my eight pages, package it all together and then I get invited to a cocktail party in L.A. for the Festival of Festivals and there's Peter Simpson. He says, 'What

are you doing?' I said, 'I'm working on this thing that is called *Prom Night*.' He said, 'Look, let's get together and talk.' This was on a Thursday. On Monday he read the treatment, came back and said, 'We'll make a deal to develop a script and do *Prom Night*.' And that's how *Prom Night* came about. It just came about looking for another area to make a film in.

**Cinema Canada:** Was the way you felt about making *Prom Night* different from the way you felt when you were making *Hard Part*? In the one you were making an effort to render a human story and a good film, and in *Prom Night*, a horror film.

**Paul Lynch:** *Prom Night* was, at that point, just as good a craft as I could make it. It had to be a really good craft, that was all. I like kids - I'd never really finished high school and so it was a chance to re-live that. It wasn't the same experience as making *Blood and Guts* or *Hard Part* because the problem with teen-agers is that there is no depth to them. I mean, no matter what you do - in England there tends to be a little more than in North America - but even a picture like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, there is only so much depth you can apply to these kids. I grant you there are real problems but, as you get older, it's a little hard to identify with them.

So in *Prom Night* it was just to do the best craft that one could and hopefully have a commercial movie out of it. Because, to that point, I had not had a commercial film. And believe me, in this business if you don't have a commercial film, you just aren't in the business very long; it's a hard fast rule. From day one with *Hard Part* it was meant to be a commercial film. Unfortunately that's why it had country music, that's why I

had people singing. I figured if you are going to tell a drama at least disguise it, at least gloss it over and sugar-coat it so the people out there who don't want to think will go in and come out with some insight.

**Cinema Canada:** What did this commercial success with *Prom Night* do to you, what did it allow you to do, did it surprise you? Were you different afterwards? In terms of opportunity, options, directions, did it open a door?

**Paul Lynch:** Yes, in the sense that then I started getting offers of scripts. After *Hard Part* and *Blood and Guts* I wasn't offered anything, so now I got offered bad scripts. And a lot of those bad scripts were made into movies in Canada. I've never yet taken a picture that was not a good script. There's no point.

**Cinema Canada:** You went from *Prom Night* to being a producer for *American Nightmare*, did you not?

**Paul Lynch:** No, what I did then is that Bill and I sat down and we worked out *Humongous*. I had shown *Prom Night* to Mickey Stevenson because I was trying to get a deal with Harold Greenberg on a picture called *New Orleans*, a very strong, good thriller about people. There was a wonderful lady named Sandra Colbert and she really rallied for me very hard and I thought, well, if I show Mickey my picture maybe he can rally too. The problem is it was a very hard-edged script and Mickey read it and said, 'No, I'm a family man.' I guess Harold read it and said the same thing. It was a women's picture and Sandra liked it a lot. But that went nowhere, so, in the course of talking about it, Mickey said, 'Well, why not another horror picture?' So I talked to Bill and we came up with *Humongous*. Originally Astral was going to be involved and then they weren't. Mickey funded it independently and Avco financed the development of it and finally it was made independently.

While that was tailing off Tony Kramreither was looking to make a low-budget movie and it was one of those situations where he had the money and no real script or anything else and I had again been working with a writer on *American Nightmare* so I said, 'Well, I have a script and as it is now November and you have to be finished by the end of the year, you should look at it.' So he gave me the go-ahead and we did *American Nightmare*. It's a thriller, a horror picture, I suppose...

**Cinema Canada:** You described it to me as a 'slasher picture.'

**Paul Lynch:** I suppose you can put labels on any of these things but it's a terror picture, it's a thriller.

**Cinema Canada:** Do you enjoy making terror/horror pictures?

**Paul Lynch:** I like thrillers, I really like making thrillers, but there's no thrill to me in doing blood or great special effects or anything like that. I was in the screening room at Quinn Lab looking at a few of the rushes from Cronenberg's picture (*Scanners*) and the effects were marvelous, they were truly stunning. But as I was watching them I kept thinking you can't get this on the screen, you can go so far but you can't get this on the screen anymore, because of the censorship.

So in rushes you can do brilliant special effects but what else? You can cut somebody's head off and it looks like a real person is being decapitated in



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front of your eyes, but none of that is a thrill; making and putting a picture together, yes. But the blood that's in *American Nightmare* I could like without it. Mungus is softer than most, it doesn't have a lot of blood.

**Cinema Canada:** *Humongous* has got the kind of response you thought it would?

**Paul Lynch:** No, because it got caught very badly in a company take-over. When it was made, Bob Rehme at Avco and Frank Capra were behind it. They were the heads of the company at the time and they stood behind it and they liked it a lot. But just as it was finished and about to be released, the company got bought by Gerry Perenchino and Norman Lear. Gerry Perenchino saw the film and hated it. Gerry obviously doesn't like horror pictures and they did their damndest to kill it. They didn't like it; they didn't want to be associated with it. They wanted Embassy to be a class company to release things like *Chariots of Fire* and what they were saddled with was a couple of pictures, one of which was *Humongous*, and they would have just been happier if it had disappeared.

**Cinema Canada:** How did *Cross Country* come about? And are you not caught in another company take-over?

**Paul Lynch:** God yes! I mean you can't bank on these things but *Cross Country* is an odd situation because nine years ago I read the book and I gave the book to John Hunter to read and he read it and I said, 'After you've read the book, I think you should take this to Sydney Furey.' Certainly if I'm a filmmaker today it's because of Sydney. Much is the CBC and much is Sydney—for his advice and for everything else. So I said we should take it to Sydney because he might be really interested. And we took it to him and he thought it was kind of disgusting. And the book was. The book was truly a great, sick, sex story. So I put it away as a great read and that was that.

About four years after that, John Hunter got a call from a Canadian producer who'd bought the rights and wanted him to do a script. So he wrote the script. But the producer then had Peter Collinson assigned as the director but could not quite put a deal together. So we kind of sat around. Pieter Kroonenberg and David Patterson were finishing up *Heartaches* and John Hunter said to me, 'Why don't you take the script? I think I can get it back from this producer.' John Danielkyw was the producer. It was just very hard to get that picture together. So I took it to Pieter and David and they read it and liked it and they started trying to put a deal together. This is going back about three years. And nothing much happened, then in February Pieter was at the Manila film festival and ran into Ron Cohen and Ron said to Pieter, 'What are you doing?' Luckily they met and the project got made. [Cohen negotiated the negative pick-up with United Artists for *Cross Country*.] It had been with me for nine years.

**Cinema Canada:** What have been the advantages and the difficulties of working on a picture which already has a negative pick-up? How does that work in a relationship and what does it require of you?

**Paul Lynch:** Nothing at all. United Artists had a production person from the U.S. who was involved in the script and approving things and that was it. Then we went away and shot it and no

problems.

**Cinema Canada:** How important is the kind of campaign and marketing which is extended on a film which is an exploitation or a commercial formula?

**Paul Lynch:** Well, whether you are talking about a *Prom Night* or *Halloween*, or a *Black Leather Bloodlust*, if one should every come along, a campaign for those kind of films has got to be at least 50% of it or maybe more because very strong campaigns get people into the theatres and it's common knowledge that films like this normally fall off somewhere around two weeks, about 25% a week. Very few of them build back. I mean very few open like *An Officer and a Gentleman* and play at 100% because there is a certain amount of audience. If you're falling off 25% a week, you're doing just fine, and if you get to 50% for two weeks you're doing just terrific. *Humongous* played for three weeks in New York and it fell off—at least at my count I think about 25%, but it didn't open strong. You know your picture is bad if it opens big and drops. If it doesn't open big you have no idea what you've got because nobody came to see the picture. If the ad campaign got them in and if we had done, let's say, a \$1.5 million on 250 theatres the opening week-end and it dropped to \$200,000, you'd know it was the film. If you open at \$600,000 for 200 theatres and you go to \$400,000 or \$450,000 the next week, you don't have a bad drop-off, but you never got a chance in the first place. That's the problem. And *Humongous* just didn't open very big. Avco had stood solidly behind *Prom Night*, and that's why it did well. They didn't back *Humongous* and there was no secret about it...

**Cinema Canada:** You have referred

to some of those films as 'garbage,' yet you also have said that it's important that they be made because they will bring along opportunities for other filmmakers...

**Paul Lynch:** Garbage is the wrong word. You see, in the '50s, there used to be "A" movies and "B" movies and studios would make both. They realized that a lot of money could be made out of "B" movies. Well, things have changed now so that there are really no "A" or "B" movies, there are just movies. However, what the States does quite successfully, with *Beach Girls*, *Junk Man* and a couple of others that have made money, is keep an industry rolling, moving around and moving ahead minus the *E.T.*'s or *An Officer and a Gentleman*. Now, in the States there has been an industry with a solid base for a long time.

In Canada, I really think that it's a mistake not to get down on one's knees and kiss David Cronenberg and the Ivan Reitmans and people like that, because every picture that they make, whether one may think that it has merit or not, spurs an industry. People who have invested in those kind of pictures have made money; therefore they will come back and they will invest again. And in the course of this they will make six *Black Leather Bloodlusts* and they may make one *Micheline Lanctôt* film, or one Francis Mankiewicz film, but unless they start to see money back, when Francis Mankiewicz or Micheline Lanctôt knocks on the door they'll say, 'No way, I've lost money.' That's the key factor. Without financially successful films—good, bad or indifferent—it's just hopeless to try and hold an industry together. I'm sure that people who are into *Porky's* are seeing quite a bit of profit on their investment and would be open to almost anything now.

**Cinema Canada:** I don't think that the argument is between making a film that makes money and a film which doesn't. I think a lot of people are getting exercised about the quality, even the commercial quality: an awful lot of films were made to exploit a market because they were thought to be commercial.

**Paul Lynch:** There is no guarantee that anything will be commercial, from *Porky's* to *Prom Night*. And you can't regulate taste. So you have the problem that what may seem commercial—a spoof comedy—may not have any commerciality whatsoever. But that's taste and a sort of sense of what the market will play. It's very hard to regulate those kind of things and I think we made an awful lot of films, neither commercial nor good. Australia tends to have been in a similar situation as Canada, but they have made more nationalistic product because they are so divorced from America compared to Canada. They haven't tried to copy American films but they've taken formulas: *Road Warrior* is an excellent example of a wonderful commercial film, done with an Australian bent because they are so divorced from the rest of the world. We are not. We are sitting four hours from Los Angeles.

But you must remember the films that have been genetically commercial in this country were always the singular work of one person, one person's idea and what they believed in. *Porky's* is the work of Bob Clark. It's his film. *Meatballs* is Ivan Reitman's film. All of Cronenberg's films are his own: self-generated ideas and self-generated beliefs. *Prom Night* was too. They are self-generated by a filmmaker who believes and cares about making a film that he likes and thinks he can make some money on. They are not packages; that's the difference. They are not producers sitting down saying, 'Hey kid! You want to make something? What do you want to make? What can we make that will make money?'

In all the cases of successful films, *Black Christmas* included, they were pictures that filmmakers wanted to do. They weren't a package; they didn't have So-and-so saying if you get Lee Majors we'll make your film. Almost all of the successful films have been generated by filmmakers *per se*, not by producers. The producers' track records are very shoddy in this country.

**Cinema Canada:** With the other films like *Humongous* and like *American Nightmare*, were you involved to the same point?

**Paul Lynch:** They were all generated the same way. *Humongous* was Bill and I sitting down and creating the film we wanted to make: a bunch of kids in the summer on an island and something terrible happens to them. I spent two years on *American Nightmare*, about what happens when a kid goes to the streets and there's incest in the family and all of that stuff. Behind the blood-letting, there's a human drama. It was put together the same way. If Tony hadn't come up with the money it probably would have never been made so there was maybe a commercial catch there in the sense that I got some money to direct the film. But certainly it was something that I wanted to do.

**Cinema Canada:** If you look over the last couple of years, *Porky's* opened a lot of doors for Bob Clark who then re-



turned to the States. He made an American film called *Porky's II*. Certainly doors have been opened all over for Ivan Reitman, partly because of *Meatballs* and partly for other work. I imagine that Paul Lynch could easily go to the States if he wanted to go to the States... You were talking about the geographical situation of Australia and Canada. Is there really a country called Canada in which to make films?

**Paul Lynch:** Well, there's a country called Canada that doesn't realize how different it is as compared to the States. It isn't having your own flag and national anthem; it's a way of thinking. If you grow up in Canada, you grow up with a Canadian sensibility which is influenced a great deal by the United States unquestionably, but never totally. There is still something separate and different about Canada. And although the two run very close and get closer every day because we depend on the U.S. for too many things, there is still a very singular place called Canada. And it isn't like any place else in the world. It resembles America to a degree but that's all. I always wonder what everybody is talking about nationalism for, because that there is no way that we are Americans.

**Cinema Canada:** You sound like you're giving me the interview that you want to see in Cinema Canada...

**Paul Lynch:** No, because we are influenced by America. I mean since the day I came here with my parents I've watched American television and a lot more of it than Canadian television. There is still a good chunk of Canada just living here, from being on the streets here. We don't make films, and I don't think we ever can, that are as genetically Canadian as films that are genetically Australian because we are closer to the U.S. than Australia, both physically and mentally. They don't get the broadcasting we get. All the magazines, all the books.

**Cinema Canada:** But today you are talking about national feeling and sensibility and yesterday you were saying that we were all in the business to make formica.

**Paul Lynch:** In the end result, that's quite true. We are all making a product to be sold on a world-wide market. Australia cannot support its own films, at least now; when it started it could. *Hard Part* was made for \$100,000 way back when, and if we could have stayed with those budgets, I think we could have made more Canadian movies. But Australia is a very good example because it is a singular place.

I think you can generate a lot more material out of Australia than you can generate out of Canada. It doesn't mean that it will have a world market. How many films are made down there? And how many do we see? What we see are the 'formicas' in actual fact, the *Road Warrior* or the occasional one that slides through, like Canadian films. You'll see *Les bons débarras* or *Breaker Morant* that played in New York and a couple of other centers, but that's where the Australian films play except for the ones that are basically formica, which are entertainment for a world market. The other ones have a very select audience, in their home country or anywhere else in the world. It's the same with German films. It's a very small market. Now they get a lot of publicity so it seems like it's bigger but the grosses of those foreign films that play in the

States are not very big at all. And the other thing that always intrigues me, and that I have never understood, is why a film should reflect a country. Because film is like formica or glass. If we were to make this glass here and sell it to the States, we would employ people; we would make good quality glass; we buy and sell it and everybody makes a few dollars. What is imbued with Canadiana except craft incurring from the company that made it?

**Cinema Canada:** But it's not glass. In films you have a chance to deal primarily with emotions, with language, with structures, with ideas.

**Paul Lynch:** If you wish to, you do. But the bottom line is, it is like that glass, like those subways... Primarily it's like subways. You just make them well and hope that there's a market for them. It's just like any other product you export. Why would you want to attach a nationality to it? Because when there's a chance for that, people do but it doesn't mean it has to. It's up to a filmmaker, or somebody deciding to make a film about the trees in northern Quebec. It doesn't mean there's a market, but what the guy should be saying is, 'I decided to make a film on trees in Quebec, can I sell it? Can I make it well? Can I see it on screen?' If the answer is no, well don't bother doing it.

**Cinema Canada:** Is there any motivation aside from money to making a film?

**Paul Lynch:** If I was independently wealthy and could choose to make anything I wanted to and had Daddy's trust fund every month, not at all. But film isn't like that. It isn't like being a writer with a pad of paper; it's a very expensive medium. I can't even make a film

for \$100,000 anymore.

**Cinema Canada:** But I presume that you will soon have the kind of money that will allow you a certain amount of liberty.

**Paul Lynch:** I was giving you the example of *Catman and the Kid*, a great human drama, a wonderful film, and I still believe that it's a film people would pay money to see; it had all the right qualities to it. Nobody was interested in doing it, period. So, you say, what's the point? You have to find something that somebody will bank-roll. And that cuts your artistic choices down a great limit. You just can't go out there and say, 'Hey, I would really like to make a film about stockcars and a young kid and his stockcar and what happens to it. Or a romance in a small country town.' As much as I would like to make that film, nobody will finance it so what do you do? If nobody will finance it, you have your script there - you have already lived half your movie writing the script and nobody will lay an eye on your film, what do you do? Do you keep knocking your head against a wall, to what point? What you have to find is some kind of compromise, and I am proud that all my films have been self-generating in a sense. I found the material, I liked the material and I turned them into movies. And I've never made a film where I worked with someone where I basically took a job.

**Cinema Canada:** If you like the material, what does it do to you to have your last film referred to as garbage and to have people remember your early films as great moments in Canadian filmmaking?

**Paul Lynch:** All films, to me, are films. I started watching movies when I was

about seventeen and I would alternately go to Ingmar Bergman pictures which I hated and Hells-Angels-on-wheels pictures which I loved. I went to all the European and all the American films and they were all films to me. I never made a classification that I would go to a "B" movie or tomorrow I'll go to an "A" movie.

What can I say about critics? It's up to them, it's their judgment to make, not mine. I've liked every film I've made. For me they got a little better each time; I've learned more and more; I can see the changes. I think I'm getting a little better at the craft as I get older and I like them all. There's none of them that I'm not proud of... I like them all, each for their own merit.

I sat in the Culver City cinema in the States and behind me were three working-class people, having a serious discussion about the merits of *The Unseen* over *Halloween*. They were treating these films as seriously as any critic would treat a \$20 million movie; for them it was entertainment and enjoyment. They were disappointed by *The Unseen* because it didn't have whatever element they wanted and they were saddened by the fact that there weren't more of these kind of movies they could go and watch. The following week-end they were going to see *Halloween* again. They were taking these films seriously as entertainment. A movie is a movie. If some people happen to like horror films, some people like other kinds of films; they put their own criteria on it. I just make what I like to make at a given point which means five years from now I could be making a western - it could be God knows what.

**Cinema Canada:** But I take it these last films have not been made because you thought that they were great stories in the way that you thought *Hard Part* was.

**Paul Lynch:** Not true. The amount of enthusiasm I generated for *Hard Part*, *Blood and Guts*, was the same that I generated for *Prom Night*, *Humongous* and *Cross Country*.

**Cinema Canada:** What would you like to do next?

**Paul Lynch:** I would like to do "Catman and the Kid" but as everybody has said no, forget it, I really don't know... I have nothing at all. There are not very many good scripts around at any level of this business whether you are Francis Ford Coppola or a guy from Georgia. A good story or a good script is just very hard to find. And to find something that really hits you takes an awful lot of time. I can tell you that for the last nine months in *Close-up on Crime*, *National Enquirer*, *The National Star*, there hasn't been a single item that would make a movie, whether horror or human interest.

**Cinema Canada:** No interest in producing?

**Paul Lynch:** I think I would like to produce a comedy, yes. I would like a kid's comedy. I'm just not a comedy director and I don't know exactly what a comedy director is and I don't think it's me. But I would like to produce one. I love the effect of people laughing; it's an instantaneous thing. You can go into a theatre and whether it's a Woody Allen or *Porky's*, you hear the audience immediately reacting to a film, particularly a comedy. I'd like to produce one of those but that's all; other than that, nothing.

