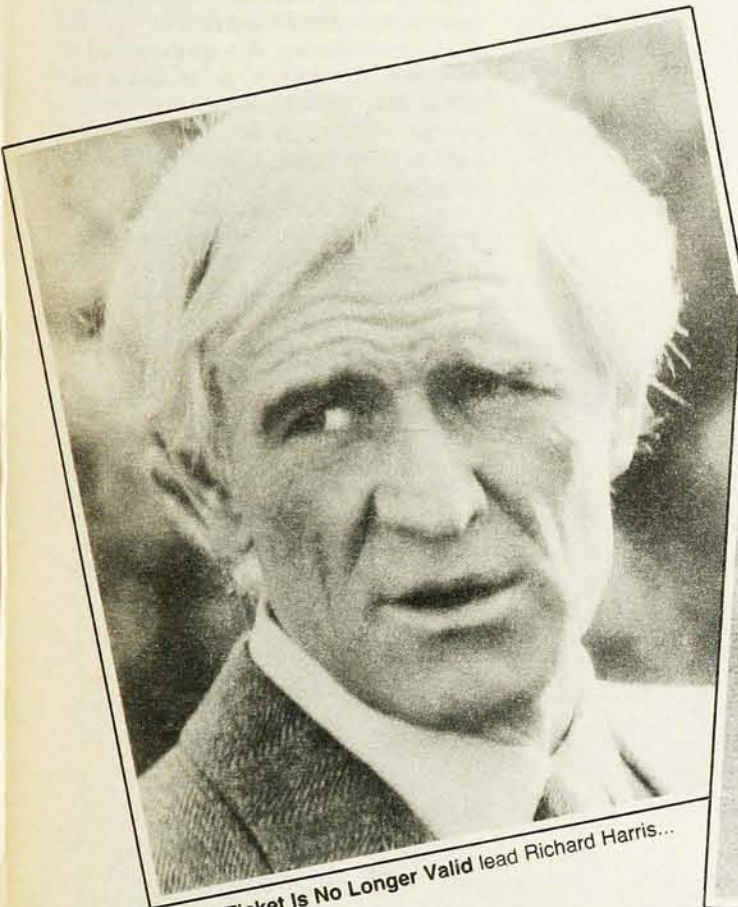


The 'brutalization' of Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid



• Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid lead Richard Harris...



producer Robert Lantos, director George Kaczender, and producer Stephen Roth

Richard Harris responds to Robert Lantos

by Tom Perlmutter

During a recent Canadian tour of a theatrical production of Camelot, British actor Richard Harris learned of remarks made about his role in the Canadian film *Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid* (1980) that appeared in Cinema Canada's interview with producer Robert Lantos in issue no. 123 last October. At Richard Harris' request, the following interview in Toronto with Cinema Canada allowed Harris to respond to the allegations contained in the Lantos interview.

Formerly Cinema Canada's Toronto reporter, Tom Perlmutter is a freelance journalist and playwright.

Cinema Canada: Let's start with the Robert Lantos interview that upset you so much. How did you come across it?

Richard Harris: It was sent to me by a Canadian producer.

Cinema Canada: Was there a note attached to it?

Richard Harris: Yes. The producer suggested I read certain sections of it. I contacted him and he said he thought it was exceedingly damaging. He believed the article hadn't done me any good whatsoever in Canada.

Cinema Canada: What was your first reaction when you read Lantos' comments?

Richard Harris: I was horrified, absolutely horrified by the inaccuracy and

falsifications. I consulted a lawyer to see about the possibility of suing because it was exceedingly damaging. A producer may have an opinion of an actor and an actor's performance. He is entitled to that. But Robert Lantos went far in excess of that. He made statements that I deliberately destroyed his picture. He made statements to the effect that I never read the script; that I only read the script on transit to location and, hating the script, set about to destroy the picture; that I only did the picture for money. I found his comments exceedingly offensive and unworthy, even for Robert Lantos. Mr. Lantos was quite aware of the extensive preparations I had done for the picture in terms of script and character analysis.

Cinema Canada: How did you get involved in the project in the first place?

Richard Harris: I was in Toronto doing a picture called *High Point*. I got a phone call from my agent at the time, Marty Baum. Marty Baum plays a very leading role in Mr Lantos' manipulation of the whole project. Marty was a very successful independent agent. Then he was head of ABC films, where he made some very successful films. He then became an independent producer and then went back to being an agent. He is regarded as being one of the most reliable agents in the business. He is also one of the most honest and tasteful. He's a wonderful reader of scripts. Lantos and Roth had contacted him and he put them in touch with me. They left me the script which I immediately read. I asked for a copy of the book on which the script was based. They didn't have a copy. After a lot of pain and search I found a copy of the book and read it. I

found the script exceedingly interesting but in certain aspects it was inexplicit. I then had meetings with Lantos, Roth and the director, George Kaczender. I met George for the first time. They told me what he had done. I made, for me, the usual inquiry into his abilities as a director. I got a copy of a film that he had directed, *In Praise of Older Women*. I found it an interesting picture but very sloppy. It appeared to me to have fragments of such cohesion and then of such sloppiness. I had to put it down to editing problems. It's impossible for a director to have that kind of style and for it to go out of style every now and then. I questioned him about that. He said that the picture had been taken out of his hands at a certain stage of the proceedings by the producers, Lantos and Roth. I got a little wary. I want to go into a picture with a director who is in total control of what he is doing and has complete authority over what he is doing.

However, at the meeting we discussed the script which even Lantos in the interview admits wasn't complete. I endorse that admittance on his part.

At that time I had done a lot of work and research on the script. I had sent it to a psychiatrist in California, a man called Eugene Landy who is a very close friend of mine. I would go to him with certain scripts and we'd have endless sessions on character analysis. We went through the script of this film to such an extent that, at the end of my discussions with Landy, I must have had at least 52 pages of notes.

I met Lantos, Roth and Kaczender again. We all conceded that the script was not perfect. I hadn't committed to doing the film yet. I knew at this stage, through Mr Baum, that other actors had turned it down. One or two very big actors turned it down because of the very reasons that we are about to embark on, in investigating the weaknesses of the script, which lay basically in the character of the man.

The story is very simple — and it's a wonderful story — about a man who in middle-age is impotent. I wanted to discover the psychological reasons for his impotence. The research I had done with the psychiatrist indicated it was very possible that there was a seed of homosexuality in this man. When I brought this up with the producers and director, they agreed. They appeared shocked and very surprised. Kaczender told me that it was in the script but they were afraid to emphasize it because a major motion-picture star would run away from it, because of image. They were quite surprised and grateful that I had acknowledged it and accepted it and was willing to pursue it in the picture.

I consider myself an exceedingly daring actor. If a subject matter of that nature is presented to me and I want to do it, it doesn't matter about my image. I don't care what people think. I am not answerable to them. I am only answerable to myself and to my own gifts and my own talent and my own integrity, not to the general public.

Cinema Canada: *So quite early on, before you had even committed yourself, you had given a lot of thought to the character of the film?*

Richard Harris: Absolutely. It makes

Lantos's statement absolutely immoral. And he knew because I produced my notes.

Cinema Canada: *Were you meeting with the scriptwriter at the point where your ideas about the man were being discussed and accepted?*

Richard Harris: No, we never met. This is another strange behaviour on their part. They stopped meeting me together. They came one at a time. I was meeting either with the director or one of the two producers.

Cinema Canada: *Had you agreed by this time to do the picture?*

Richard Harris: No, not at all. It was subject to their accepting what I had to bring to the part. At this stage we all agreed that my analysis was superb. They were going to go in that direction. I finished the film I was doing in Toronto and agreed to do the picture, with the usual clauses like cast approval. I asked who was going to play the leading role opposite me, the girl. They suggested three people. They showed me three photographs. I don't remember two of their names. I remember the third. She was Jennifer Dale. Mr Lantos never disclosed to me at that stage that he was living with Miss Dale. I would have had an objection to doing the picture. It's a very tricky situation if the producer is sleeping with the leading lady. There are all kinds of complications. I wanted to avoid complications.

By the way, before I accepted the picture, to show you how serious I was, I made inquiries about the producers. I discovered that Jennifer Dale was Lantos' girlfriend. I asked for a meeting with Lantos. I told him that he had failed to disclose to me that Jennifer Dale was his live-in girlfriend. I said, "You submitted three names to me but I have been told that she has already been signed to the picture and yet I have approval. Am I to believe that you submitted to me those other names as a kind of blind? It appears you haven't been very honest with me." Lantos said, "Oh no, my relationship with Miss Dale is over. It's one of those casual things but it's absolutely finished." End of story. I was committed to the picture.

When I arrived in Canada to shoot it, no work had been done on the script. There were no changes made, whatsoever. There was nothing done, for all the talk. I suggested a postponement for a couple of months. They said they could do it and everything would be o.k. I said, all right, if that's the way you want to go. It sounds a very expensive way to me.

My first day of shooting with Jennifer Dale, not necessarily my first day shooting, involved a scene in which my character tries to make love to her after riding horses. I was introduced to her for the first time. This young lady, carried away maybe by her position, I don't understand, began to explain to me in front of the entire company what the scene was about and where the camera would be put. All my fears came out in one moment that her situation with Lantos was not over. It was an intolerable situation for me. I blew. No question about my letting off some steam. I told her that she may be a very, very brilliant director and a very brilliant young lady, but I signed a contract with Mr Kaczen-

der to direct the picture. And I walked to my caravan.

Lantos speedily came down to the set. I told him he had lied to me. He sat there very, very quiet. I said, however, that's a *fait accompli*. What you do in your private life is your own business, but I don't want it interfering with the picture. I had very high hopes for this picture.

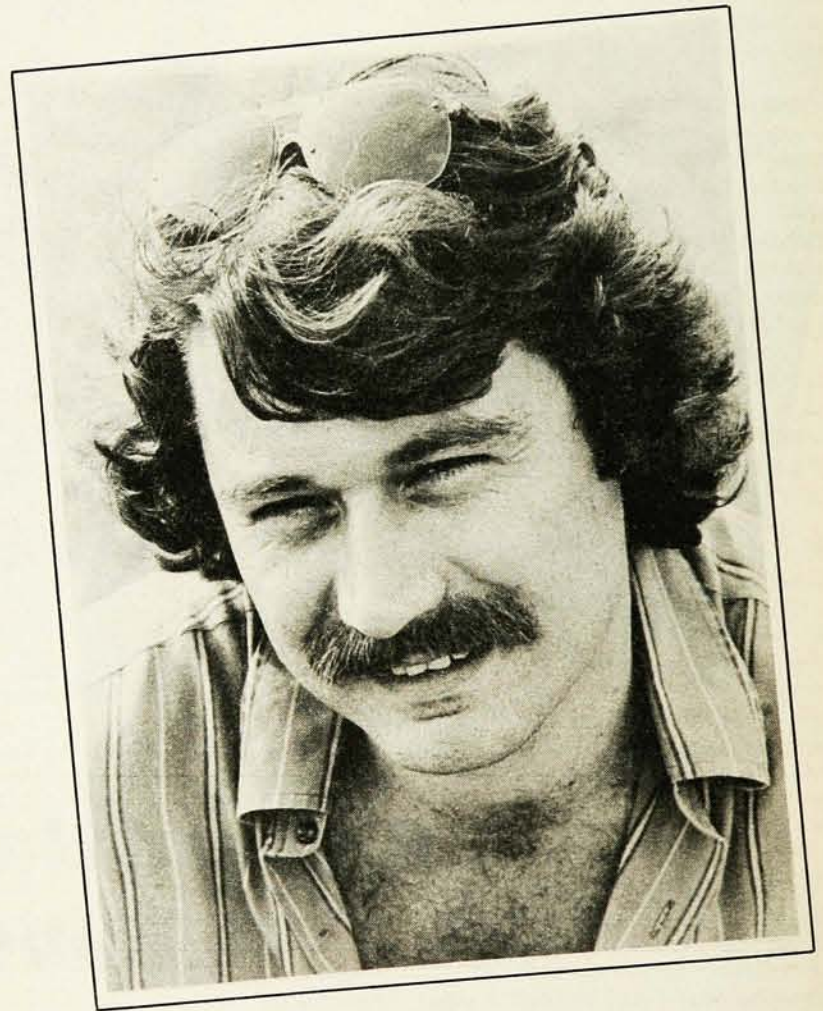
From then on, they made rewrites. The director was coming to me with ideas for rewrites as we went along. I never forced a rewrite on anybody in the picture. Prior to the starting of the picture I did. I asked for rewrites but never put pen to paper. But through the shooting they were ignoring everything they had guaranteed me before.

Cinema Canada: *Were you frustrated by that?*

Richard Harris: No. Whoever was

Cinema Canada: *Did you feel that with Robert Lantos you were working with someone who was highly creative?*

Richard Harris: Not at all. What transpired during the making of the picture was very interesting. I had this wonderful idea about the end of the picture. At the end, my character decides to commit suicide. Before he does so he takes off a hairpiece and he looks like a grotesque caricature of a human being—little band-aids that kept the hairpiece in place. At a pre-ordained strike of a clock, as he walks to his death, his left shoe falls off and we discover he's limping. He even had high heels to make himself as big as his father. The director wondered whether that scene would be advisable given my image. I didn't care about that. I asked him what it was like for the picture. He said it was staggering. But apparently Lantos had terrible objections.



doing the rewrites was doing a wonderful job. I would suggest where things might be going wrong to the director. This is par for the course for the actor/director relationship. It is like a pre-marital agreement. A movie is a marriage between director and actor. And in a marriage there will always be conflict. There has been conflicts between David Lean and Alec Guinness and they continue to work together. It is not raised immorally and with a certain amount of ugliness in a newspaper article six years later. Differences of opinion are part of the creative temperament. I don't believe that I'm omnipotent, but the relationship between the director and the actor has to be openly creative. And there will be disagreement. Anybody that thinks there won't be disagreement should make, as Lantos says of himself, *papier-maché* pictures.

It transpired he objected to the homosexuality and to my taking the hairpiece off and that grotesquerie at the end of the picture. His objections were that it would lower the audience's appeal to Jennifer. It would make them question her. He said that a beautiful woman like Jennifer would not fall in love with a man who wears a hairpiece and high-heel shoes. He objected to the homosexuality because it too reflected upon Jennifer's sex-appeal. Lantos said that Jennifer is such a beautiful woman that my character wouldn't fall for a young man. I asked Lantos if his impotence wasn't equally destructive for Jennifer's sex-appeal. He said no because he had the impotence in America. He got it in America and brought it to France where the action took place. Therefore Jennifer was not involved with his impotence.

Lantos' motives for the picture were purely and simply to establish Miss Dale as a major international motion-picture star. Lantos approached my agent to ask if he would represent her. Having someone like me, who at that time had accessibility in terms of distribution and my name in America would somewhat guarantee an American release and she would be the somewhat star of the picture with me and so forth.

I was now faced with a producer who is offering me objections to a script two-thirds through the picture for the flimsiest of reasons that it would denigrate the actress playing the part. To me it is absolutely meaningless.

Cinema Canada: *Did you feel there was any point in carrying on? At that point didn't you just want to finish and get out as quickly as you could?*

Richard Harris: No, not at all. I don't suppose I ever worked so hard on a film. I worked 18 hours a day, well into the night with only four-five hours sleep and back into the shoot again.

Cinema Canada: *Despite all the sudden revelations of objections from the producer, you still had faith that the director had some control over the film?*

Richard Harris: Yes, my relationship with the director was fine. I remember he came to me one day, pale and shaking. Lantos had accused him the night before of betraying Jennifer Dale and favouring Richard Harris in the film. Kaczender said he was on the verge of collapse with the aggravation. Let me give you an example of how Lantos was behaving.

He came to my room one day to talk about the script. I was at the time separated from my wife Ann, but she'd come to see me for the week-end. The hotel-room had winding oak stairs to the bedroom. Lantos heard the noise from the bedroom and he accused me of having somebody up there listening to our conversation. I told him there was a lady up there. He said that I had somebody up there listening to our conversation for evidence. I asked him for what evidence. He then accused me of tape-recording the conversation. He said that the atmosphere wasn't congenial to a discussion about the script because of that. I shouted up to Ann, and she eventually came out, and introduced him to my wife. It was an alarming outburst.

Let me give you another example. Kaczender and I came up with a wonderful scene. My character comes to look for the young lady one day. He sees white roses on the table and is convinced that she is having an affair with somebody else. He goes in where she is having a bath. He looks at her face. He knows he's going to die but she doesn't. He looks at her and touches her nose and says, I invented this line, "You know, for the first time I've noticed that your nose is not straight." He walks out the door, sees the flowers and can't help feel rage. He charges down and frags the flowers. That scene was taken out of the picture.

Lantos said Jennifer Dale's nose is not crooked, it's a perfect nose! How can you do this? He also objected to the scene after it was shot because it reduced the character of Jennifer. Jennifer

was not unfaithful and the audience would think she was. And we musn't have the audience believe for a moment that Dale's character is responsible for this man falling in love or becoming sexually attracted to a male. The whole issue of possible homosexuality was offensive. It was an extraordinary situation to be in.

Lantos accuses me of terrorizing the set and playing the part like Julius Caesar. I don't know what that means. There is one moment in the picture, in fact, when the character has a pain in his groin. He gets out of the bed, takes the sheets off and walks out of the room into another room and sits in a chair draped in this white sheet that looked like a toga. And because I have a Roman face or a Roman nose, I suppose Lantos got an image of Julius Caesar. It's incomprehensible that this man couldn't see beyond that or was incapable of seeing beyond that.



● On the *Your Ticket* shoot: Harris and Kaczender, above; Harris and co-star Dale, right

I'll tell you something else. When the picture was finished, we came to see the first assemblage. Marty Baum flew in from Los Angeles and a man called John Van Eyssan who was once the head of Columbia Pictures in London and has been a friend of mine and somewhat artistic advisor to me for years. One of the most tasteful and well-read men I have ever met. We sat in Montreal and saw two hours of the film. Afterwards, Marty Baum got up and said, "You are going to win the Academy Award. It is stunning. I have never seen a performance in depth or detail like that." John threw his arms around me—he knew some of the heartbreak I was going through making it—and said, "It's an incredible picture." That evening, when we all went to our rooms, Lantos rang Marty Baum and asked him to represent Jennifer.

Three months later, there was a public showing in Montreal. We all came back to see it again. I sat in horror in the cinema in total embarrassment. They had taken 50-60 minutes out of the film. They had restructured it totally.

In our script, the script submitted to Richard Harris to perform in, Jennifer Dale doesn't come into the film for the first 30 minutes. He talks about her but you don't see her. It's all to do with this man's collapsing empire, the effect of

his father on him, how demoralized he has become with the new world. Jennifer doesn't come in for 35 minutes. When we got to Montreal for the public screening, she is in right at the beginning of the picture. Everything prior to it is taken out of the picture and my performance is indeed, erratic and, in places, ludicrous. If you take the ghost out of *Hamlet* you are left with a *Hamlet* which is a raving lunatic. If you cut the handkerchief from *Othello*, you are left with a perfect example of a paranoid. They brutalized the film.

When I saw Kaczender he told me that the picture had been taken out of his hands by Lantos. Lantos destroyed the picture. There is a scene in the picture to which I referred earlier. She is having a bath and I walk in and look at her nose. Lantos wanted that out of the picture because Jennifer's nose was perfectly straight but he left in the bath sequence without me so you see her hav-

cut. I offered to fly to Montreal at no cost and that I would pay for the cost of the editing if they gave me the opportunity to assemble the picture that we saw in its original form, and I could still take 15-20 minutes out of it.

After three-four months Stephen Roth finally called me in the Bahamas. He said, 'we'll take you up on your offer.' They were now destitute. People had seen it. It was a joke, a shambling joke.

I flew to Montreal. I went to the editing room and met the editor. I asked him what had gone wrong. He said that Robert Lantos had stood over his shoulder bullying, screaming and intimidating. He wanted to cut as much of the homosexual thing because of Jennifer. We finished the work in a day or two. I showed it to Stephen Roth that night. He stood up and threw his hands around me and said, 'you saved it. Thank you so much.'

Nevertheless what they released was not what Roth and I saw when we re-edited the film. Apparently while I was in Montreal, Robert Lantos was in Paris making a deal. That's why they let me come in. When he came back, he apparently went beserk and demanded that



ing a bath with her tits bare, because Mr Lantos has a tendency towards pornography in his past movies. In the original scene, there is a camera down on the floor shooting her in the bubble bath. You see my legs walking across the camera before she looks up. The camera goes up and sees me looking at her. They left in the legs crossing the camera. All of a sudden, Jennifer is in one spot doing something, the next moment she's in the bath and the next moment she's back in the pre-bath scene.

In contradiction to Lantos's remarks that I didn't care for the film, Marty Baum and I tried to buy it back. I asked Mr Roth how much the picture cost. He said, six million. Marty said he could raise the money. I said: 'Let us buy the picture back, every bit of footage, sound-track, continuity sheets, everything. I know we have masterpiece.' Marty said we could probably raise five million. I said to him I'll put back my million-dollar salary to make it up to six. Mary called Roth, with the offer. Would they be prepared to sell the picture back for the negative cost? He was turned down. Mr. Lantos said he had a perfect belief in the film.

At this stage I was absolutely destitute. I rang them time and time again, begging them to go back to the other

the picture be returned to its disastrous state. That is the extent of his vindictiveness.

What about the investors? Were they told that we offered the six million dollars to get out of it clean, get their money back while we would take the risk? Were they told that?

Let me ask you something else. If I had behaved, as Lantos says I behaved, why, therefore, six months later, did his partner Stephen Roth ask me to meet him in New York and offer me another picture?

Mr. Lantos has the right, absolutely, the absolute categorical right to say that he didn't like my performance in the picture. That's his right. I wouldn't deny him that right. He doesn't have the right to go further than that and to say that I sabotaged his picture. It wasn't true at all. In fact, the contrary is true. I did everything in my life to save it. I put my money where my mouth was, where my instincts were.

Cinema Canada: *Would you still be willing to buy back the original picture?*

Richard Harris: It's too late now. It's into cassettes so some of the ancillary rights are gone. Where are we going to get back our investment?