

Cinema Canada: *In terms of time and money, what were some of the problems in writing stand-ups to unedited film?*

Gwynne Dyer: The result of doing that is that, of course, you'll be shooting 10 or 12 times as much film as is needed. You can't wait until the end to do all the stand-ups. You go out and shoot in the Soviet Union four or five different films for various segments and then you do stand-ups for various films there. And this is before a cut — before the films are edited. So you're guessing how it will fit in. And, very often, the stand-ups won't fit in — they're not saying exactly the right thing by the time you've got the film cut. But you can't go back on location. So we got very good at doing things that we call "modular stand-ups"; that is to say, they sort of started here and went to there. But they could start a little bit later, or end a bit earlier, or drop a bit out of the middle. That depended on whether or not the words that we'd locked ourselves into by shooting a stand-up actually were the words that would get you from A to C in the film when you drop the stand-up into slot B. Some of them you just throw away in the end. I reckon we threw away a third of what we did.

Cinema Canada: *The soldiers you spoke with were very candid. Did your own military background facilitate those talks?*

Gwynne Dyer: I suppose it did. We did talk about that a bit, because it was quite striking how much access we were given, and how much confidence was offered. In terms of getting through the door, my credentials helped a lot. It helped that I could draw upon my own military background to understand what was going on. Soldiers didn't have to explain basic things to me. Since they didn't have to do a kindergarten explanation of proceedings for me, we could get on with more serious things. I think that the other thing is simply that I respect them. I did have a kind of bottom line in the series which is, that it mustn't dump on soldiers. I did hope that soldiers would like it in the end — which they did. And I had to have that kind of approach simply because I, on the whole, do like soldiers. They're fairly honest people...it's sort of a by-product of the profession. If you like people and it's visible to them that you do, they do tend to trust you more.

Cinema Canada: *Given that you achieved this high level of trust with the soldiers that you spoke to, did you have a problem with taking what they said to you and using their words to make your own ironic statement about war?*

Gwynne Dyer: Well...it's a question in any kind of journalism that one is up against all the time. To get people to talk to you, you convince them that you are a trustworthy person. The way you use what they tell you may appear offensive to them. Usually, if you're a practising journalist, in the end you say, "Well, tough." And there's all sorts of rationalizations — "You ought to have known better, etc." I don't actually like these rationalizations. If people are going to give you their confidence and speak openly to you, you owe them the duty of at least letting them know

roughly what you have in mind. Well, that's fine in theory. In practice, I can't say I always do that.

But soldiers are not naive about their job; they do know what it implies. And it is not as offensive to them as you might think it is to have it said in so many words. They have their own rationalizations for what they do. When we were working on the episode "Any Son Will Do," in the *War* series, which dealt with the brutality of boot camp, I got to know a lot of the different soldiers. Civilians will look at that episode and say 'Dyer better never go into a bar where there's Marines again.' But I think I'd probably be willing to sit in a room full of Marines and watch that film with them. Maybe I'd sit near the door, but they know that that's what they are. The thing is that they're proud of it. They reckon it's a worthwhile thing to be, and they're being accurately portrayed in the film.

Cinema Canada: *After the War series was shown, was there any back-lash from the military?*

Gwynne Dyer: Never from the military. The abusive mail was all from civilians...people who ideologically hate what you're saying. About half of it was concerned with the episode on Israel. There are three or four subjects that you can write on that you know you'll get mail. Israel is one. And it's basically from people who have a certain fixed rationale for the world which justifies all of their views. And if you don't share their rationale they'll write you letters about it — generally in green ink.

Cinema Canada: *The series first began on radio and then enjoyed immense success on television. Now it has come out in book form. Are you happy with the book?*

Gwynne Dyer: I am quite pleased with it actually, though it tended to get done in hotel rooms late at night. Yeah...I'm pleased with it. In the series, as I said, you get about 2000 words of script to film. You can't say (except very allusively) what you mean a lot of the time on film. And so it was a great relief in a way to put it in a book and to be able to say it all.

Cinema Canada: *The new series Defence of Canada deals entirely with Canada. Why did the War series, which was a Canadian production, have so little Canadian content?*

Gwynne Dyer: In fact, that was quite interesting. We got very little cooperation from the department of National Defence here when we were doing the *War* series. They just didn't want to know. So we got cooperation from the Americans and the Russians and the Israelis and the Germans instead, and shot it almost all there. The consequence of doing the *War* series was that we suddenly became *persona* very very much *grata* at National Defence in Ottawa. Patrick Watson told me, when the series was running, that Jean-Jacques Blais (at that time defence minister) immediately instituted an inquiry as to why there was so little Canadian content in the series.

The answer was that we'd asked and asked and asked and they'd say no. So when we went back to do *Defence of Canada*, we got total *carte blanche* for operations in the armed forces here. ●

Up yours!

Elvis Gratton co-director Pierre Falardeau on Quebec, filmmaking and media culture

by Neil Wilson

Several months ago, as Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin's hand-made feature Elvis Gratton — Le King des kings was having a successful theatrical run, a letter to the Le Devoir editor challenged Quebec intellectuals to accept that Elvis Gratton was the archetypal figure whose existence made a Quebec national cinema impossible. Ironically Elvis Gratton's creators themselves emerged from the libertarian strain in Quebec filmmaking that goes back to Gilles Groulx and the other nationalist feature filmmakers of the mid-'60s.

Falardeau, born in Montreal in 1946, studied ethnology and began making documentaries in 1970 with Continuons le combat, an ethnological study of wrestling. In 1973 Les Canadiens sont là, produced by the Canada Council, looked at a group exposition of Canadian painting at the Paris Museum of Modern Art. In 1975 Le Magra documented the training of cadets at Quebec's Police Academy. A Force de courage (1976) followed agricultural workers in post-colonial Algeria and played at festivals from Finland to Italy. His 1978 documentary feature, Pea Soup traced Quebec's gentle cultural genocide. The first Elvis Gratton short, (30 mins, produced by ACPAV) was made in 1981.

In the following brief interview, Falardeau casts a bleak eye over the present cultural scene and the return to power of Robert Bourassa's Liberals.

Cinema Canada: *What are your views on cultural sovereignty in the light of the debacle over Bill 109, Quebec's Cinema Law?*

Pierre Falardeau: Quite frankly, cultural sovereignty is a stupid concept. Quebec premier Robert Bourassa was talking about cultural sovereignty back in 1975. I thought it was crazy for Quebec then and now suddenly Mulroney's using the term. It was stupid then, it's stupid now. Culture is a whole. From an anthropological point of view, within culture you have economy, religion, art, politics, everything. It's a whole life and now they're saying they want to preserve one small part — art. OK, we'll give the U.S. the economy and the rest, but we'll keep art. Can you imagine? Culture is the whole life of a people, your work, your buildings, your streets.

In the history of the world there have been hundreds of cultures, very different from one another. It's not a question of one being better than another. The richness is, in fact, in the differences. In our time there's an obvious levelling. Cultures everywhere are being threatened by American culture. Pretty soon everywhere in the world people will be eating hot dogs and the only history will be the history of Mickey Mouse.

So what's the difference between Quebec and Texas? There's the same types of houses, same suburbs, same shopping centres, same Pizza Huts, same MacDonalds, same Zellers. How do you expect to preserve a few stupidities like novels or cinema? It's idiotic. Culture is much more. It's as much our cuisine as the architecture of our buildings.

Cinema Canada: *So, how do you do it? How do you, as a filmmaker, propose that we protect our culture?*

Pierre Falardeau: Ah, well...it takes a will, a political will, and not just that of

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• **Elvis Gratton**, an archetype arising from the ashes of Quebec's national cinema: Pierre Falardeau in foreground, Julien Poulin as Elvis

a prime minister or one political party. For example, look at what's happening in Iran, or in Libya, not that I'm not making any moral judgements here. Maybe Khomeini and Kaddafi are mental cases, but at least somewhere in the world someone is saying to the U.S. 'up yours!' I think that's important. I'm not saying I agree with what is going on in these countries but at least these are countries trying to preserve what is theirs. They're not buying the American or European or Russian way.

In our own situation, the guy I liked in the P.Q. government was Jean Garon, the minister of Agriculture. He was asking how you can protect a language when everything else is foreign. Garon said: let's grow our own crops here. In eight years he doubled our agricultural self-sufficiency. At one time, way back, Quebec was a real wheat producer: we even supplied Britain. But then we let the other provinces grow the wheat. Before Garon we didn't have enough wheat to make a 16 oz. loaf! This is cultural sovereignty. This is culture.

Cinema Canada: How do you feel now that the Liberals are back?

Pierre Falardeau: I'm a little depressed you might say, yes. But, really, in a

sense, the problem started in 1976 when the P.Q. took power. We lost our vigilance. In 1976 all of us who were fighting for our culture, the artists, everyone, all said, 'At last, it's done, the government's taking care of things!' Collectively we let go.

Cinema Canada: It seems, then, from a cultural point of view, the return of the Liberals means, let's eat at MacDonalds and let's watch Dynasty.

Pierre Falardeau: Yes, that could be. It seems people generally don't want to think anymore.

Cinema Canada: How does that affect you as someone who's made films like *Pea Soup*, *Speak White*, and *Continuons le combat*?

Pierre Falardeau: Today I make *Elvis Gratton*. I tell them, up yours! All these films are basically the same. I want to shake people, wake them up. Things now are really flat. Few people are saying anything interesting. For me it's a question of life and death. There's nothing else.

But do you hear this debate going on anywhere today? It's not just Quebec, there's a kind of global apathy...no future, as the punks say. I think it's pathetic.

When I go to the cinema I don't see many real people or real human beings on the screen. It's all depression or escapism, and lots of technical tricks.

Cinema Canada: So where do you turn for inspiration?

Pierre Falardeau: At the moment I'm re-reading the old stuff, guys like Camus and Montaigne. We're living in hard times. Often in history there are periods of great adventure and newness. Then it grows flat. Look at Russia in 1917. Creatively it was very stimulating. There was Eisenstein, Mayakovsky, Vertov — great stuff. Afterwards it closed down. In Mexico, in 1911, what a time! In Quebec 15 or 20 years ago, things were really happening.

Cinema Canada: So for you, *Bill 109* is irrelevant?

Pierre Falardeau: Yes, in a way I don't give a shit, but then again I know it's important.

Cinema Canada: Tell me about your background as a filmmaker. You're considered a radical.

Pierre Falardeau: I don't consider myself a radical. I consider myself normal. My sympathies are with people who are

human beings. And for me being a human being means you have to fight for your liberty. Now, I don't see many free men and women. They're all walking around like...like that...like zombies.

Cinema Canada: What kind of filmmaking influenced your work?

Pierre Falardeau: One of the greatest filmmakers in the world is a man named Gilles Groulx. He said "If I fight personally for my liberty I have at the same time to defend the liberty of my people."

Cinema Canada: Are the two separate, your life as a filmmaker and your political activism?

Pierre Falardeau: No. I hate that, people who, for example, make pornography and then call themselves political militants. My work is my political militancy.

Cinema Canada: But it must be hard for you to work, to get money to make films in view of your...your reputation?

Pierre Falardeau: One possibility is to make very short films — 10 minutes, 5 minutes. Films that I can do myself without asking anyone for money. Films that won't be seen. I can make one short film each year. Maybe I'll have to drive taxi or cut wood in the country, but I'll make films. It's the thing I do least poorly.

Cinema Canada: Are you working on a film now?

Pierre Falardeau: I'm finishing a documentary on the Beaver Club.

Cinema Canada: *The Beaver Club*?

Pierre Falardeau: Yes it's an annual supper for the Montreal bourgeoisie, the Canadian bourgeoisie. It goes back to the imperial fur trade and the Hudson's Bay Company. Each year they put on a show with a \$150 cover charge, and they eat, they dine. It's a real spectacle. They eat like pigs.

Cinema Canada: And you got in? How did you manage that?

Pierre Falardeau: Because I'm a shit!

Cinema Canada: Obviously this is not public relations, at least not for the Beaver Club.

Pierre Falardeau: No, and it's going to be rough, I hope. Having no money is an interesting way to make a film. I used an old camera and a voice-over. I'm not re-inventing cinema with this or anything, but let's just say I don't think this will turn up on TV. I mean if Radio-Canada or the CBC wants to show it, that's fine.

I don't aspire to be marginal. I make films the way I know how. If someone gave me \$10 million and a cast of 50, fine, I wouldn't turn it down. I'm not against success, but I will always make films my way.

Cinema Canada: All this talk about commercialism, and making a product to sell, then, it's a problem...

Pierre Falardeau: Sure. You can spend 95% of your time and energy raising money but you've got to keep your sanity. I've got a young baby. I've got to be in good humour. When the fun stops, I'll quit. Life is too short.

I need to have fun with my work or else it becomes, I become, impossible. ●

photo: ACPAV, Lyne Charlebois