

• Sink or swim – Robert Ménard and Jean-Charles Tremblay lighting *T'es belle Jeanne*

## Changing Self-Image

Beginning in January 1989, Quebec's francophone television viewers will have their own version of the Movie-of-the-Week. A package of 10 feature-length movies is being made in a deal that brings together four of Quebec's major production companies (Les films Vision 4, Productions VidéoFilms, Productions Oz and Productions du Verseau) under the one title, Les Producteurs TV-Films Associés. The National Film Board is also involved as a co-producer. Each film has been designated a budget of \$846,000 and will be shot within a tight 18-or 19-day period.

After the completion of Alain Chartrand: *Des Amies pour la vie*, filming began November 25 on the second movie, *T'es belle Jeanne*. It is directed and produced by Robert Ménard, written by Claire Wojas (both of whom also did the successful TV series *Un amour de quartier*), and stars Marie Tifo, Michel Côté and Pierre Curzi.

I was at the Montreal Rehabilitation Institute, where a great deal of the film was being done, the morning of Friday, December 12. There was a relaxed air on Ménard's set. Aside from the fact that it all got under way in Montreal's first big snowstorm of the season – (anyone familiar with a Montreal winter will understand all that implies), the shoot was going well.

The scenes filmed that morning take place in the pool where Jeanne (Tifo) and Bert (Côté) undergo hydrotherapy. The pool area is small and the tempera-

ture a balmy contrast to the brisk winter outside. Because there isn't much space, there weren't many people on the set. In fact, the crew seemed to be very small, but then, the film does not involve any of the stunts or special effects that require lots of people.

The south wall is a bank of windows that must measure at least 20 feet in height. The ledges are high too, but wide enough for members of the crew to sit on and get out of the way when the film begins to roll. On the opposite wall are a couple of rubber stretchers connected to a system of tracks that run over the top of the pool. Patients are placed in the stretchers which are then moved along the tracks and lowered into the water.

At one point a real patient was brought in; he was friendly, smiling, and seemed to know the movie people. As I discovered later, several patients from the Institute did participate in the film as extras. But at the time it was a painful shock to be reminded that Tifo and Côté were just acting what is reality for everyone else using that pool. It was a reminder too of how a film set creates its own reality; it becomes a separate world where what is being filmed has little to do with the world most of the people involved in telling the story really live in.

For Tifo and Côté however, the action meant a lot of getting in and out of the pool – drying off just to get wet again. There were several set-ups, and each scene was short, involving only three or four lines of dialogue.

Both Jeanne and Bert have suffered injuries to the spinal cord which have left them paralyzed. Each must come to grips with the idea of being 'handicapped' and these scenes, to some extent, seem to illustrate how each deals with the tragedy that has completely changed their lives, their futures, their dreams, and perhaps, most of all, their self-image.

In one scene Bert panics as he floats about in the pool because he has the sense of being left alone. He reacts with rage to his physical helplessness, but Jeanne's calm voice reassures him. In another the two float together, with buoys around their necks and arms. Bert, who was injured in a motorcycle accident, lifts his right arm slightly to make the motion and sounds of revving an engine. Without having seen any other scenes from the film, or having read the script, I assume that these scenes, in addition to contrasting the characters, also illustrate the tenderness and the complicity between them.

Some of the moments are intense and some playful, and it seems evident that the characters of Jeanne and Bert could not be more perfectly cast. Tifo and Côté appear to inherently have the personality traits that characterize Jeanne and Bert, so that I could sense, even in the film's most raw state, the depth these characters may have in the finished product.

Filming of *T'es belle Jeanne* finished on schedule on December 15, with snow once again falling over the city. Like the other films in the package, it has all the components for success, according to the American formula. It combines Quebec's confirmed technical talents with some of the most popular actors and actresses in the film and television industries, and has an emotionally grounded story that considers contemporary themes and issues.

Whether or not all the components of American success prove successful here in Quebec is anyone's guess. But I suspect these films will differ from their American counterparts in several ways: the depth of characters they give us; the allowance for nuance in the treatment of the topics; and conclusions that won't be so pat.

Jamie Gaetz •

## Tell Me Lies

It is a deceptively bright blue day of summer sunshine but the radio and the wind say to bundle up. The cold cuts razor-sharp through wool stockings straight to the bone. The cold is forgotten and left outdoors with a blast greeting from the generator heater blaring warmth into the Old Montreal warehouse that is the set of *Little White Lies*.

Romance, the genre tells us, always manages to manifest itself in the presence or semblance of warmth. The set of *Little White Lies* does not disappoint. To the right and centre is the kitchen. Underneath the gleam of brass pots and pans a bottle of wine rests on the wooden counter. Across the kitchen is the living room with the mandatory fireplace. Modern sculptures stand guard behind comfortable drop and die chairs. On a platform, to the near left, is the bedroom – also predominantly wood. An old sea-chest sits at the foot of the bed. Every detail has been carefully positioned to complement and enhance a romantic development. And well it should for *Little White Lies* is another Shades of Love production. And Shades of Love is in the business of bringing True Love into our living rooms.

The plot of *Little White Lies* is familiar and true to formula: a young lawyer (Linda Smith) falls in love with a man (Duncan Regehr) she presumes to be a carpenter-handyman. The romance is complicated by social barriers and snobberies. She's from an established WASP background and he's of Mediterranean origin. Can these differences be overcome? Of course. He turns out to be a successful sculptor – though his Mediterranean roots are left intact – and they fall in love while attempting to solve one of her cases.

During the break I'd walked into, director Susan Martin attempts to eat thick clam chowder from a styrofoam cup. She scowls at the clumps on her spoon and explains that her influences for *Little White Lies* are not the romance novels but, rather, the classic movies with strong female leads that combined romance with intrigue. She was also influenced by the passion in the love magazines of her day – read gleefully, as an adolescent, behind the backs of disapproving adults.

She smiles at the memory but doesn't indulge in it. "The appeal, directorially," she says, "lies in the challenge of the mystery woven into this romance..." Susan stirs the chowder with her spoon, "...in anticipating and constructing the scene...in measuring the beats and





photo: Ron Diamond

• Sharing a special moment – Duncan Regehr and Linda Smith in *Little White Lies*

creating a rhythm of tension out of which romance can evolve from suspense." She pushes the styrofoam cup away and looks at her watch. It's almost time to resume filming and there's a camera shot she wants to discuss with the cameraman. The lighting director has a suggestion about the pots and pans. He also mentions that if the lights hit the statues a certain way, their shadows will look like pregnant women.

I am delegated to the room with the heat generator. There are others there who have returned from their lunch-break. They stroll around wood frames and workbenches. Some take their position on the set. The heat generator is turned off. The man with the walkie-talkie and the headset standing guard on the street says "Stand by one-two-three." A voice by the set hollers "Here we go – quiet!" Nobody moves by the workbenches. Another voice is heard, "Ça tourne Un, deux, trois" and Susan Martin whispers "quiet". "Stand by. One Two Three. Ça tourne – Rolling – quiet please." Nobody told the horse outside to trot softly. Cut. "Calèches and tourists" a man beside me mutters.

Everybody in the workroom takes the opportunity to change places or shift before the countdown makes them immobile again. "Ça tourne. Rolling. Quiet please." I can now see into the set. Scene: His kitchen. The pots and pans glow warmly. He opens a bottle of wine and pours a drink. She takes the glass and looks up into his eyes. He takes off his sweater and sits down as she sips from her wine and says, "What do I know about... Give me a plea-bargain injunction..."

A guy beside me, wearing a line of clothespins around his neck, makes knots and plays with the pins. A woman on a rocking chair reads her lines. Her chair creaks once. She looks up but nobody seems to have noticed.

The boom mike moves above the set and the actors have changed position and have become invisible. The slats separating the set from the workroom are in my way.

The knot-maker wants to sneeze. He looks sideways and around the room. Nobody else is making a noise. He holds his nose and his sneeze. His eyes water. "O.K. Cut" Susan says softly. I missed the magic of the first kiss.

But the knot-maker relaxes and, miraculously, loses his urge to sneeze.

Ana Arroyo •

## Not Just a Hooker Movie

It's round midnight in Toronto's well-heeled Annex neighbourhood. A fine drizzle adds an unusual chill to the mid-October air. Two transvestite hookers, Joe-Anne (David MacLean) and Rocket (Stan Lake), attempt a tango by a back-alley wall. They giggle and stumble under the lamplight, dreaming of lives played out in safety – and romance.

They are miles away from the 'track' where tonight, no doubt, real whores shiver and dance. Rocket and Joe-Anne, along with their neophyte friend Janet (Valerie Buhagiar), are the main characters in the movie *Dear John*, produced by Ordinary Films and shot in Toronto last fall.

Between takes production assistant Malcolm Tweedy rushes over like an insurance agent with an umbrella to shield the actors from the rain. This is his first film shoot and he is obviously delighted to be on the set. A few months ago he was still in Vancouver shooting video for a local cable TV station. Now, as an aspiring director of photography, he watches every set-up with intensity. A few feet away from the actors, the camera operator gives a gaffer some technical pointers.

"Not another hooker movie!" was the initial reaction writer/director Cathy Ord received when she first showed potential distributors the script of *Dear John*. But the quality of the writing disarmed them. The story of *Dear John* may be set among prostitutes but it's really about gender social roles and the various masks people wear in their different relationships. A deal was eventually struck with Norstar releasing.

The budget is just over \$400,000 with more than 85 per cent coming from Telefilm and the OFDC. *Dear John* is Ord's first feature but it was developed from a 20-minute dramatic short, also called *Dear John*, made by Ord several years ago. That film, filled with flashbacks, was mostly concerned with the unhappy pasts of Rocket and Janet. The focus of the full-length movie is on how the characters relate to one another in the present.

The laid-back atmosphere on the *Dear John* set was no accident. Ord selected people not only for their technical capabilities but also for their ability to contribute creatively to the project. "I didn't want to leave behind the kind of atmosphere I was trained in," she says. "Film is an art but it's also attached to a complex social situation and it's also tied to money."

Four weeks later, on the 26th and final day of shooting, there is no danger of precipitation as a cold sun burns amidst a chilling wind. Rocket, Janet and a few crew members are stuffed into a small and claustrophobic west-end laundromat. Ord confers with cast and crew, rehearsing the actors, adjusting the blocking, scrambling onto a couple of washers to peer into the camera, then over to talk with d.o.p. Doug Koch (*I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*). Both Ord and Koch are tall, wirey and red-haired; they could be twins.

Outside, several would-be patrons have to be rerouted to another laundromat. Most passersby don't mind standing on the sidelines while the camera is rolling, such is their conditioned respect for the status of filmmaking. But two elderly women, all in black, refuse to wait, even for a minute. They chatter angrily at us in their own language as they trundle slowly down the street. Theirs is a gesture of ownership and permanence marked against the film crew's fleeting intrusion.

A couple of doors down from the laundromat is a secondhand store-cum-repair shop. Crew members truck in and out in search of warmth and bargains. Everyone admires the leather briefcase Malcolm copped for a dollar.

At the sound of his name the best boy, Terry, bounds out of the shop, dust flying, the price tag flapping against the lens of his new dark glasses. "You need these because you are in the movie business," the proprietor had told him. "Only 50 cents." It was a deal.

Now that it's a wrap, Ord is in the editing room working six days a week. She hopes to have everything in the can in time for Cannes.

Randi Spires •

• Janet and Rocket try on new roles at Rocket's birthday party.



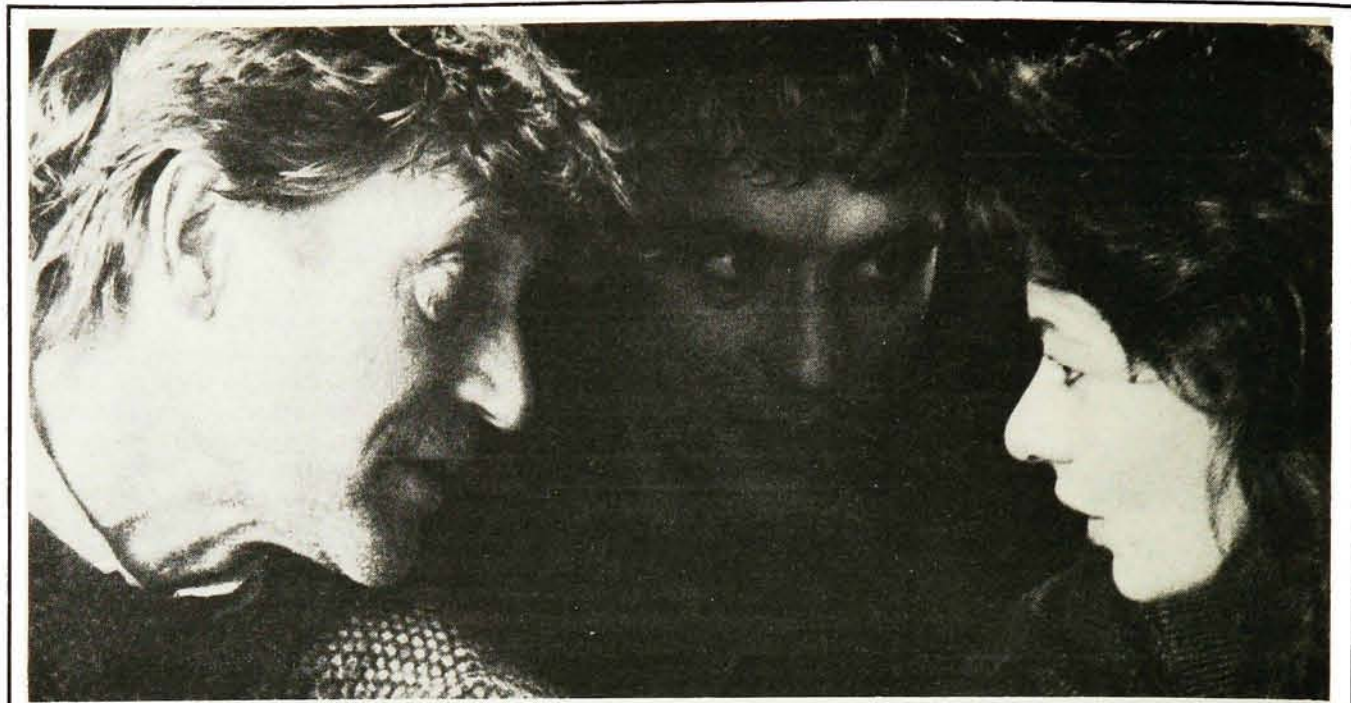


## Quiet on the Set

My experience on the set of Léa Pool's new film, **Kurwenal**, was something of a disappointment. Precisely what my expectations were remains ambiguous, and having never observed the filming of a full-length feature, I probably should have had none. I suppose that I had hoped to witness that which has made me come to respect, admire, and, above all, identify with Pool's films. Although I am not much less ignorant in this regard, I now respect Pool as much for her means as I do for her ends.

My interest in visiting the set of **Kurwenal** increased upon reading the press release announcing the shooting, as I was struck by how the film's story resembles and yet is a departure from Pool's previous work. **Strass Cafe** (1979), **La Femme de l'hôtel** (1984), and **Anne Trister** (1985) relate the stories of women, with underlying themes of alienation and courage, and as such have been loosely termed a trilogy. Ideas and sentiments which are particular to women are not addressed in **Kurwenal**, but here as in the past Pool uses a cultural medium within a cultural medium as mediator between the character and his/her anger which is simultaneously personal and universal: photography is to Pierre Kurwenal as film directing is to Andrea in **La Femme de l'hôtel** and as painting is to Anne Trister, uniting the art form with the soul.

Pool once stated, "I am more concerned with communicating emotions in a film, as opposed to telling a story." This would appear to be the case with **Kurwenal**. Pierre Kurwenal's story is a simple one, that of a photojournalist who returns to the home he shares with two people, Sarah and David, from an assignment abroad, only to find the apart-



• A discreet moment: actors Matthias Habich (Kurwenal), Michel Voïta (David) and Johanne-Marie Tremblay (Sarah)

ment deserted except for the cat, Tristan. He responds by examining the misery which is his own and his city's, rather than that of atrocities so far away, with the aid of his camera lens.

The scene which I saw on my arrival on the location of **Kurwenal** at first seemed very far removed from all that I knew of Léa Pool, her previous work, and her latest film. My first impression was that of watching others watching television. A dozen or so people were crowded in the foyer of the old manor, all peering through a doorway to a classic dining room where nothing of any particular interest seemed to be taking place. However, these spectators were far from passive, creating an ambiance that was in sharp contrast with the warmth and sweet odor of their surroundings.

The appearance of a man, through the doorway, frantically arranging an elaborate table setting and shunning the help of an elderly woman at his side, reminded me of my purpose there. The face of that man, so anxious and intent, could only be that of Pierre Kurwenal, played by Matthias Habich. In fact, Denise Robert, the producer of the film, later told of how she and the others had been taking a break from the auditions for the title role, somewhat discouraged

by the absence of a suitable actor, when they caught sight of Habich passing by and exclaimed, "That's Kurwenal!" That afternoon, Habich, with his craggy, intense face and pensive, tense posture, appeared before them to audition for the role of Kurwenal.

If it were not for the presence of the spectators — the various members of the production team — and the one line called from off the set by Jacqueline Bertrand, Kurwenal's mother asking if she could come in, I could have easily forgotten that I was on a film set. Pool, the cameraman, the first assistant, even the lights and the camera were all invisible from my perspective in the foyer. Even between takes there was near-silence from the dining room; the stereotypical commotion on a film set was only a myth, with only the occasional command from the first assistant to be heard. This is apparently typical of the way Pool works; she herself has said, "*Ma façon de tourner n'est pas spectaculaire* (My way of shooting isn't spectacular)." Indeed this is an understatement. From my corner in the foyer, I could only assume that Pool was somewhere in the other room.

During another take later on that afternoon, I had more of an opportunity to see Pool at work. Indeed, her approach is so low-key that it would have been difficult to realise that she was directing

the production if I had been unable to recognise her. Every instruction or comment is intimately offered in almost a whisper to the person involved, and as such it was almost always impossible to know why one take was inadequate and another just right. While the filming is taking place Pool is even more discreet, huddled beside the camera, hands in pockets, studying every movement of the actors on the set. The result is an ambiance of simultaneous calm and intensity. Only once was there evidence of frayed nerves, when the telephone rang during a take. Pool, obviously annoyed that someone failed to take it off the hook, says with disdain to no one in particular, "*C'est élémentaire, ça* (That's basic)." But the moment is brief, and the calm soon returns.

To witness a filming which is so unspectacular by a director whose works are far from just that is rather disconcerting. Jeanne Crepeau, apprenticing as second assistant for **Kurwenal**, admitted that she, too, has attempted to discern in production that which creates a *cinéma magique*, only to be frustrated in that attempt more often than not. Pool herself has said, "I am always amazed by my own material." Having watched her at work, I am certain that I will be too.

**Paula Sypnowich •**