

Claude Fournier's  
**Les Tisserands du pouvoir Part I, II (La Révolte)**

**A**s Part I of Claude Fournier's *Les Tisserands du pouvoir* begins, Baptiste Lambert (Gratien Gélinas), an old man who came to Woonsocket, Rhode Island as a child, is exploding with anger because the local TV station plans to cancel its French-language broadcasts. Baptiste complains to the TV people and to municipal politicians, but they all dismiss him as a senile crank.

After all, times have changed. The textile mill Baptiste worked in when he was young is about to be torn down so that the Japanese can build a motorcycle parts factory. French is virtually a dead language in Woonsocket, and hardly anybody thinks about the old days. For the town's Franco-American mayor (Donald Pilon) and the young generation, embodied by a rookie TV reporter (Francis Reddy), the Québécois heritage of the town is "ancient history."

Desperate, Baptiste puts up a one-man protest by barricading himself in a little out-building of the abandoned mill with a home-made bomb. Surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers, hysterical politicians, and gum-chewing American cops, the old man decides to tell his story to the young TV journalist with no interest in his French Canadian roots. From this point on, most of Part I and Part II's (*La Révolte*) four hours consist of flashbacks framed by Baptiste's showdown against total assimilation into the American Way.

*Tisserands'* flashbacks follow the adventures of three families, who, as the film progresses, connect with each other in various, sometimes remarkably coincidental ways. The Lamberts, Baptiste's family, represent the poverty-stricken French Canadians who migrated to New England in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the Fontaines typify the middle-class Quebecois who also headed south. The Roussels, an industrial dynasty from France, are the kind of early multinational entrepreneurs who built textile mills in New England and coldly exploited people like the young Baptiste (Denis Bouchard) and his father Valmore (Michel Forget).

The old Baptiste, who never leaves the window of the little gatehouse he has occupied, seems to remember everything that happened to all these people over a period of several generations. Somehow, he even knows about the power games and sexual shenanigans the Roussels were fond of in France.

*Tisserands*, with its many sub-plots and locations, is certainly an ambitious production.



Rémy Girard, Pierre Hébert and Pierre Chagnon in the height of fashion

Claude Fournier calls it "a big, complex story" and "a mosaic of impressions" that add up to a total picture of the people whose lives revolved around Woonsocket's mills of power. Unfortunately, some of the pieces of this mosaic are not especially captivating.

Part I of *Les Tisserands*, much more so than Part II, tilts toward the Roussels (the picture is a Canada-France co-production). When we are with them in France as they engage in family disputes and extravagant beach parties, we are really in the familiar TV territory of the enviable wealthy mini-series dynasty. M. Roussel (Jean Desailly) pushes his weight around; Mme. Roussel (legendary French actress Madeleine Robinson) frets; and fireworks literally go off when young Jacques (Aurelien Recoing) romances a flamboyantly bohemian actress (Corinne Dacla), who gives *Tisserands'* period *mise-en-scène* a startling flash of full frontal nudity.

The Roussel scenes don't add up to much in themselves, and they also don't have emotionally contrapuntal relationship to the scenes that portray the Lamberts, the Fontaines, and the other Québécois migrants. The sequences in France, and later in Part I, scenes portraying a decadent Montreal milieu in which haute-bourgeoisie meets haute-bohemian, glitz up the movie. But they also dilute the impact of *Tisserands'* central drama and theme, the bitter disillusionment of the Quebecers who migrated south.

In *Jean de Florette/Manon des Sources*, another four-hour picture released in two parts, Claude Berri builds up a mythic, epic *mise-en-scène*, but the story concentrates sharply on only four characters, who are revealed in mesmerizing detail.

*Tisserands*, especially Part I, cross-cuts at top speed from one set of its numerous characters to another. You don't have enough time to connect firmly enough with vivid, but only broadly

outlined, central figures like Valmore Lambert, or Emile Fontaine (Pierre Chagnon), the young doctor who goes on a crusade for the factory workers. Emile's father (Clément Richard, a former Quebec cabinet minister) appears and drops dead in the same scene. (Fournier jokes, "We don't deal with his funeral - so that's one funeral out of Canadian films.")

Despite these problems, *Les Tisserands du pouvoir* consistently holds your attention partly because Fournier knows how to build rough-hewn, but potentially dramatic or comic moments. In one dynamic set piece, the migrants prepare for their *fête St. Jean-Baptiste*, and the camera pans dozens of kids dressed up in angelic lamb costumes, the last with a cigarette dangling from his lips.

Later in the picture, the Archbishop of Montreal (TV personality Claude Corbeil) pompously asks Simone Fontaine (Gabrielle Lazure) whether she's ever had "commerce with a man." The elegantly dressed Lazure climbs onto the Archbishop's well-appointed desk, spreads her legs, and asks him if he would like to perform the examination himself. As Corbeil munches on a cookie and stares balefully at Lazure, Part I of *Tisserands* gets one of its biggest laughs.

*La Révolte*, Part II of *Tisserands*, continues to criss-cross between the lives of the decadent rich and the poor migrants, but it concentrates on the rebellion of the factory workers and their ally, Dr. Fontaine, against both the mill owners and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Valmore Lambert erupts (in one scene, attacking a priest during holy communion), and the movie gains a new potency.

*Tisserands* also holds its audience because the picture features what seems like half of Quebec's *vedettes*, giving generally solid, amusing performances in new roles. Pierre Chagnon plays an earnest idealist in a bowler hat; Dominique Michel is a discretely alcoholic

widow who spends her life sneaking drinks; Juliette Huot portrays a bossy nun; and Anne Letourneau shows up in *Tisserands* as an angular lesbian dressed in men's suits.

Finally, whatever the strengths and weaknesses of *Les Tisserands du pouvoir*, the picture's history lesson is clear, and the issues are spelled out. The mill workers didn't just lose their identity; some of them, including children who worked brutally long hours in dangerous conditions, lost their limbs, and even their lives.

It would not be unfair to argue that *Tisserands* is sentimental, melodramatic, and conventionally staged and shot, but Fournier is a populist who wants to make movies about the people he genuinely cares about in a form that large numbers of those people will actually watch. He's not going for cool, post-music-video anxiety; he aims at the tear-dust, the gut, and the groin. And he gets his shit-disturbing messages across to audiences that enjoy receiving them.

Maurie Alioff •

**LES TISSERANDS DU POUVOIR PART 1 & 2 (LA REVOLTE)**

p. Marie-José Raymond, René Malo d. lsc. /filmed by Claude Fournier w. Michel Cournot, from an idea by Marie-José Raymond. d. o. p. John Berrie p. mgrs. Sylvie de Grandré, Catherine de Guirchitch (France), Jean-Claude Cattelle (France) 1st. a. d. Mireille Goulet cont. Monique Champagne mus. Martin Fournier, Normand Corbeil cost. des. Michele Hamel, Christian Cost (France) chief makeup Michele Dion casting Lissa Pillu (France) ed. Yuri Luhovy, Claude Fournier 1st. asst. cam. Paul Gravel, Isabel Ferrandis (France) 2nd asst. cam. Sylvie Rosenthal, Catherine Sebag (France) key grip Yvon Boudrias, Joseph Beghin (France) gaffer Jean Courteau, Patrick Fontaine (France) props Jacques Chamberland sd. eng. Normand Mercier, Jean Quenelle (France) unit man. Renée Leclerc, Francis Duthilleul (France) stills photog. Jean-Francois Gratton, Jean-Paul Ledieu (France) hair Richard Hansen, Josiane Delcourt (France) p. coord. Danielle Boucher p. sec. Heather Mills, Isabelle Rolland 2nd. a. d. Jacques Loberge, Georges Gourmelon (France) 3rd. a. d. Guy Bouchard apprentice d. Richard le Bon apprentice cont. Lorette Leblanc asst. cost. des. Louise Gagné cost. Pauline Fortin, Emmanuelle Corbeau (France) cost. asst. Lyse Pomerleau, Solange Cote electricians Alex Amyot, Paul Viau, Serge Lobry (France), Daniel Cramette (France) grips Jean-Pierre Lamarche, Marion Maihot, Angelo Sensini (France) boom op. Marc Beaulieu, Daniel Banazack (France) makeup asst. Roselyne Hoffmann, Marie-Annick Bascour (France) sd. hair Johanne Paiement, Marylène Colin (France) art d. Muriel Wahnoun (France) Francois Laplante, Guy Lalonde, Réal Ouellette set dec. Anne Galéa props exterior Louise Pilon, Jean Peciaux (France), Jean-Claude Deseure (France) researchers Francois Fauteux, Ken Meany graphics Susie Mah, Jean Aubé props asst. Simon Chamberland apprenti Patrick Chassin, Stéphane Lestage animal trainer Jean Cardinal sp. fr. Louis Craig set coord. Dominique Houle drivers Michel Quinn, Marc Doyon, Guy Létourneau p. a. s. Benoît Laroche, Guy Ferland, Brigitte Singher sd. Jerome Decarie sd. assts. Diane Douville, Monique Vezina sd. rec. Jocelyn Caron dial. ed. Alice Wright asst. ed. Eric Genois sd. eds. Louis Dupire, Antoine Morin mus. rec. Paul Page mixers Michel Descombes, André Perrault l. p. Graben Gélinas, Michel Forget, Denis Bouchard, Andrée Pelletier, Aurelien Recoing, Jean Desailly, Madeleine Robinson, Gabrielle Lazure, Dominique Michel, Pierre Chagnon, Clément Richard, Paul Hébert, Rémy Girard, Anne Létourneau, John Wildman, Juliette Huot, Donald Pilon, Francis Reddy, Vlasta Vrana, Denise Filiatrault, Claude Corbeil, Gérard Paradis, Corinne Dacla, Dennis O'Connor, Francis Lemaire, Gisele Casadesu, Charlotte Laurier, Elisabeth Burr. With the financial participation of Téléfilm Canada and the cooperation of la Société Radio-Canada.