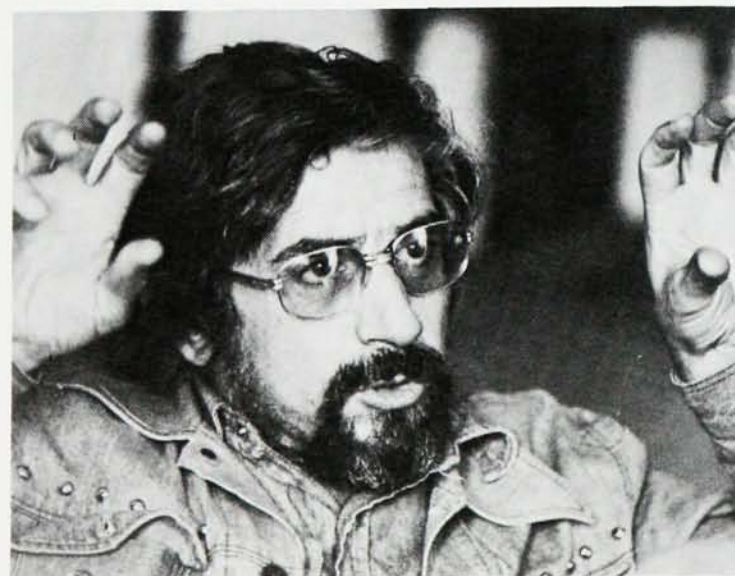


La Mort d'un Bûcheron directed by Gilles Carle; written by Gilles Carle in collaboration with Arthur Lamôthe; Director of Photography – René Verzier; Sound – Henri Blondeau; Producer – Pierre Lamy. Produced by Les Productions Carle-Lamy Limitée; with Willie Lamôthe, Carole Laure, Daniel Pilon, Pauline Julien, Marcel Sabourin and Denise Filiatrault. 35mm color feature film.

– interviewed by George Csaba Koller edited by Simone Nyro

There seems to be so much activity in Québec filmmaking now . . .

Photo: Toronto Star



Yes, there is a lot of activity. But now, with everything becoming so professional – the unions, the actors, everyone is getting very serious about it – it will be hard for young people to start making films. You have to pay a cameraman \$750 a week. This is the basic rate. Low-budget films are now impossible – like the way I made *Le Viol d'Une Jeune Fille Douce* or *Léopold Z*. It's impossible. So even if you make a film with young people, you need \$150,000 to start with. That's a lot of money. Almost no-one is prepared to put that

GILLES

La Mort d'un

kind of money into a first film. So, all the money has a tendency to go into the hands of the same people. We are privileged ones, with Claude Jutra or Claude Fournier. And I think that is very bad. But anyhow, we are trying to produce one or two features this year with people who are 22 and 23.

Who are these young directors?

One is Jacques Chenail, and the other is Michel Bouchard. Jacques has done only one 16mm film, and Michel only one documentary. But we based ourselves on the script which they wrote and which is very good. So we decided to go ahead with it. We've found some money, but it's very hard to get it. It's harder to raise \$5,000 for youngsters than \$100,000 for the established filmmakers. And nobody helps except the Law – the CFDC. You still have to raise the other 50,000 or more, though, because of the wages. You have to pay that. The solution for them is exactly the solution I took for *Le Viol* – which is to get back to an amateur film. They want to be professional, but it is almost impossible.

Because of the Unions?

Yes, because of that. Not that I am against unions. I think the unions are good. But for the people and the distribution we have now, and the kind of money put into film – you need to own a part of it. We're trying to say, "O.K. We will pay you that kind of money, but invest 2/3 of your salary in the film. That would reduce the budget and you will have some ownership in the film." They don't want to accept. It's hard for them. The money is there – they would like to grab it and have it

But ownership rights seem to be such an ideal solution for films

It is. If you write a script, you're entitled to \$10,000. You're paid \$3,000. But if you get \$2,000 – it's alright when you're starting. I haven't been paid for a script yet, so it doesn't matter . . . But it's hard. It's not easy to get it. But we'll get it. We produced three first films. One by Jacques Gagné, one by Denis Arcand with Lefebvre, and one by Jean-Claude Labrecque – *Les Smattes*.

That film wasn't a success. Did you lose money on that?

We don't mind that. We made enough on the others. You really lose nothing if the film doesn't make money. Maybe you lose a little, and you lose your producer's fees. You just don't *make* money. But it's really not that important. The way we work right now, we are not a company in the sense that we used to be at Onyx Films. We're very tiny, with nine people all over the place; secretaries and everybody . . . So each film is a new budget. We produce \$2,500,000/worth of films/ a year. But we're little. We have no equipment. We share it with other production companies like Potterton and Interlock Films. We just get money to make one film and then we produce it.

Who are the best cameramen working in Québec now?

The best are Michel Brault, Jean-Claude Labrecque, René Verzier, Georges Dufaux, and one young guy who is just

coming up — Daniel Fournier. The one who works the most is René Verzier because he is well adapted to the kind of production we do in Montréal. He works so fast, it's hard to believe! Mostly that is the reason why he works. He shot *Les Mâles* and *Bernadette*, and just finished Harvey Hart's *The Pyx*.

How closely do you work with your cameramen?

Until *Bernadette*, I wouldn't say that I worked very closely

CARLE Bûcheron

with them. I was saying "I want this" and that's about what I wanted. But now I have changed about everything in my life, so that the participation of everyone is greater than it was before. *La Mort d'Un Bûcheron* is not the same kind of film. For one thing, we shot only with available light, and mainly hand-held camera. We had to wait for the light to be proper. It takes a lot of time but the result is much better. It's truer.

Did you shoot it in Super-16?

No. I intended to. But the problem with Super-16 is that you have to use a lot of lights, and you can only get it blown-up well in Sweden or Hollywood. So, I got the Panavision camera. The long one. It makes some noise, but somehow it's a nice sound that you can have all through the film and forget about. Most of the time, shooting with long lenses and all, you don't even hear it. So it's shot with that camera, and no lighting, and 200 ASA inside. Sometimes, even normal inside, there was enough light. I chose my locations with windows everywhere, and lots of light coming through. So I could have my people coming into the sun . . . Their shadows . . . It's just beautiful. Beautiful scenes. I didn't have any Elemacks, any dollies, nothing! I just shot hand-held most of the time. Sometimes, the feeling of *La Mort* . . . is like 8mm. What I really worked on was the actors. The actors, and the truth of the situation. *Bernadette* is so organized, planned and all that, that I began to feel as if I were caught. I had to shoot what I had to shoot . . . If this section was shot, the link to the other one had to be shot. You're not free anymore. In *La Mort* . . . I felt much freer. And that was nice.

I tried many different things because I am a little tired of what we call *mise en scène*. I did it in *Bernadette*. It's so . . . The machine is going, you know? The machine was going so fast that something was left behind. So this time I said to myself, "I'm not going to do that. I'll start all over again." It's very funny, because I have never retraced my steps. Never. When everybody at the National Film Board was doing *cinéma vérité*, I was doing the opposite.

I did one film which was *cinéma vérité*, called *Un Noir de Famille* (1964), which was censored by the NFB. They cut 35 minutes out. Only 25 minutes of it was left, so it's not a film anymore. I understood at that point, that the extreme limit of *cinéma vérité* is espionage. Spying on other people. Which I don't like. "Put the camera in the bathroom and go away . . ." The best things I have were when the people forgot the camera. But I was shy to use them. I had a guy at a party telling me — while the camera was on — how he met his wife. And she was beside him, and he was talking about her as if she weren't there! As if she were an animal! We couldn't put that in the film because it's too much . . . I could produce it with actors, but I would feel shame if I put in that man who forgot about the camera, and who was a little drunk . . . Any man who would speak about his wife like that — you know what I mean?

I had a lot of things like this. Finding people as they were. But this to me was the limit. Let's say you want to make a film about the workers at General Motors. It's difficult. Or to go and shoot the religious pilgrims going to the shrines, because they feel ridiculous on film. And they are right! They are ridiculous on film! But if you want it, you have to rebuild reality.

It's funny, though, because I like actors to be very real.

Daniel Pilon Willie Lamôthe and Carole Laure



Photo: Carle-Lamy

The language has changed and you have to change the dialogue too. So I am coming back to that kind of filming – cinéma vérité.

Does that mean that your actors improvise their scenes?

I don't improvise with actors. I wrote my dialogue for this film completely, to the last word, and didn't change a bit of it. But the writing of the dialogue is much different. It's not the same as *Bernadette* at all. It's dialogue taken from life. (Which is much harder to write). *Bernadette's* dialogue was more organized. It's part of the structure, and it's a little 'bright' in a very unintelligent way. You can be bright sometimes and be unintelligent. So you have to forget this. I'm not bright. I'm just real.

Could you talk a bit about *La Mort d'Un Bûcheron*?

It starts with the documentary. We have a camera going over St. Catherine street among the people. It's the life force of the film. At the same time, the story is truer. Waitresses are real waitresses, their talk, their dialogue . . . When you shoot with available light, it's amazing what you can do . . . *La Mort d'Un Bûcheron* is a murder story. It's not really a murder story, but it is in a way. It's a murder which you discover and reach through love letters. (It's based on a novel I wrote a long time ago.) There are two parts. The first is letters written to a woman who cannot read. The second part is letters from a stranger. They are love letters and all through this you discover what has happened to a lumberjack nine years ago – An incident, sort of confrontation because of food and other things – in which three lumberjacks were killed, and they were called revolutionaries. They were killed . . . These are three incidents which happened – one in northern Ontario, one in northern Québec, and another I don't know exactly – which was told to me by my father. I joined the three incidents together. The lumberjacks were expecting the big boss of the company, but fifty police came with machine guns. I changed my whole approach to that because of the nature of things, and the subject itself. (And I wanted to play with the light. I wanted it to be very true.)

So, I did some news footage, but with no-one on the screen. It's funny, because you shoot nothing but you still get the feeling of news, of something happening. The incident is revealed in this way to the spectator. I don't really have to do it with policemen, or things like that. There was a guy left there to be the janitor of the lumber-camp, and not to let anybody come in. He didn't talk for nine years, but he was participating in the incident. Because the police and the company and the non-revolutionary lumberjacks got together to see that it never made the news. Which happened. There was some footage done by the CBC about one of the incidents, and I tried to get it. So I redid the whole thing with this guy just talking and singing about what happened. In his own little way, he was involved. I shot the incident, but without any people. So you

don't know if this is the truth or not. I shot it in black and white . . . You see the camera going here and there but there is nobody. Only this man's voice. Because it is today, nine years after . . .

So you attempted to catch the actuality with a documentary feeling . . .

Yes. But it's not real news. It's *very real*. You have the feeling of reality, but at the same time reality is pushed to the point where it seems unreal.

For instance, we filmed a girl with the sun crossing her face and shoulders, and one part of her is black – with a burn – like in 8mm film. If you have that through the whole scene and you play with it – it becomes surrealistic. It's unreal. I have a girl walking from behind the camp. She phones somebody. But instead of showing her clearly, she is in the shadow. I managed to shoot in an hour when the sun would not hit the telephone booth. It hits a truck, and a guy waiting for a phone call. So you do not see her – only the guy waiting. I tried to change certain things . . . When she goes to the city, she feels that the city is very aggressive. So I shot almost right beside her sometimes.

The result of all this started to show up, even while I was editing. Everybody coming from New York and Toronto to look at what I had, would look at a scene and say, "Wow! Shooting in a car with no lights, nothing. It's fantastic! The beauty!" The beauty. Not the landscapes. There are no landscapes in a film like that. It's the beauty of the light on people, changing when the car moves . . . When the sun comes in . . . The sun in the air . . . the hair . . . Bright, burning like a fire . . .

I like this film because at the end, the guy who has been guarding the camp for nine years felt very guilty because he was on the wrong side. He came to understand it . . . He developed a sort of religious folly or religious craziness. Seeing flying saucers and all that . . . And he started to sculpt in paper the heads of all the 25 lumberjacks in the incident. We have the lumberjacks in paper, with their glasses, and their caps; everything there. Just white. You can see it all there. He sculpted them all. He was almost finished when my people came. I set up this last shot. This was my way to tell the incident. We filmed the paper sculptures, but we didn't light it. It's beside a window, so the sun comes in and burns the paper. Burns the heads. It's very strange. At the end, they burn all the heads. They all become very black because of the glue in them. Black profiles on the screen . . . Turning black . . . Collapsing . . . This is part of it. It's a burning film – the light comes in the window and burns . . .

So everything for me has changed. I could never go back to that old style. I will start my next film with no lights – like this one – and then maybe adding light in a very tiny way. Very delicately. But the poetry of existing light is beyond comparison to anything else. It's very beautiful! I love it. ●

Willie Lamôthe



Carole Laure



Denyse Filiatrault

