

Gilles Carle

Gilles Carle portraits by Lois Siegel

Gilles Carle's prepared bio is an impressive one — the kind politicians have, full of universities attended and a long list of literary credits. Carle smiles in acknowledging the similarities and quickly goes about setting the publicity man's facts straight.

Born in Maniwaki, he came to Montreal to study art history at L'École des Beaux Arts because he wanted to be a painter. Although he did graduate, it took him another 25 years to get his diploma. ("I didn't have \$15.00 at the time. The Quebec government finally sent it to me with their compliments.")

His next stop was at McGill University. ("I don't remember why, but one morning I decided I would be an ambassador so I registered at McGill.") His stay was a short one, prompted by boredom at having to listen to lectures on how to write letters in 'due form.'

At the Université de Montréal, he received a certificate in literature, but he wasn't impressed with the experience or the certificate. "A certificate only certifies that you went there, not that you're brilliant and you studied — just that you showed up."

If nothing else, his erstwhile attempts at conforming to academia introduced him to fine literature, including Marcel Proust. ("I was quite young when I read Proust and I decided I would be the French Canadian Marcel Proust. But I had two things against me: I wasn't a homosexual and I wasn't a good writer, so I never became either one or the other.")

Nevertheless, the publicity man's bio says: novelist, playwright, poet — not bad for a failed Proust. Unfortunately, neither of his two novels were published, none of his plays were produced and his poems were, in his own words, "not very good." On the other hand, the process of elimination that took him from aspiring author to filmmaker has had its rewards. ("All that material from the novels and plays, I'm using today.")

Leaving Montreal and his university training behind, Carle became a lumberjack, a trapper and generally "... tried it with life. And that's how you become a filmmaker. In my time, it was how many jobs you had: now it's how many drugs you've had. It's changed from exterior to interior."

Carle returned to Montreal, working as a journalist, a cartoonist and a graphic artist. He didn't need anyone to publicize him then, he did fairly well all by himself. ("I spent all my time boasting that I was better than everyone else, that I could write the best script, anything — and finally someone called my bluff.")

The National Film Board of Canada was in the market for scripts and Carle wrote one which it wanted to buy. ("I told them they could have the script if I could come with it and they refused. Of course, seeing as how they were from the NFB, they returned with a compromise and I ended up being a paid observer on the production. I watched

by Kevin Tierney

the guy shoot this horrible little thing called *Tout l'or du monde* and they offered me a job as a writer.")

A self-described movie fanatic, with early memories of *Rin Tin Tin* and *Mickey Mouse* Carle really wanted to be a writer-director, and so turned down the writer's job. It took another six months before the Board came around and offered him a contract as writer-director.

His first assignment was a project on the Eskimos in Churchill Bay. Although the film was supposed to be about their 'noble way of life,' Carle decided to do a little research and his script reflected what he discovered. ("I decided to put a little truth into the film — the salaries of these workers, the fact that there was no union; that they were being used as cheap labour. I expected a lot of praise for my work, but instead I was punished. They wouldn't let me make another film — they put me into exile therapy doing research about the Ontario moose.")

What follows is about how Carle survived the moose and went on to make feature films that have been acclaimed at home and abroad, including the recently released *Les Plouffe*, the most ambitious film ever undertaken within the Québécois community.

Filmography

Dimanche d'Amérique (short), 1961
Manger (short), 1961
Patinoire (short), 1962
Natation (short), 1963
Patte mouillée (short), 1963
Un air de famille (short), 1963
Percé on the Rocks (short), 1964
Solange dans nos campagnes (short), 1964
La vie heureuse de Léopold Z (1965)
Place à Olivier Guimond (short), 1966
Jeux de Jérolas (short), 1967
Le Québec à l'heure de l'Expo (short), 1968
Le viol d'une jeune fille douce (1968)
Red (1969)
Les mâles (1970)
Steréo (short), 1970
Un hiver brûlant (short), 1971
La vraie nature de Bernadette (1972)
Les corps célestes (1973)
La mort d'un bûcheron (1973)
Les chevaux ont-ils des ailes? (short), 1975
La tête de Normande St-Onge (1975)
A Thousand Moons (short), 1975
L'ange et la femme (1977)
L'âge de la machine (short), 1978
Fantastica (1979)
Les Plouffe (1980)

Cinema Canada: Tell me about your early years at the National Film Board.

Gilles Carle: It was a very interesting experience because it was very much an underground situation. There were actually two NFB's, one which worked during the day and one which worked at night. During the day, if you wanted to see somebody, you had to go through a secretary and make appointments and all that, but at night we were among ourselves, the underground people, drinking coffee and scotch and doing just about anything we wanted.

I do remember the long corridors and all the sounds coming from the editing rooms where all the maniacs were working, staying awake with coffee. There was a sense of community. I would knock on Clément Perron's door and say, 'Come and see what I've done, it's a masterpiece,' and he would come into my room and say, 'Oh, Jesus Christ, that's good!' Ten minutes later he would knock on my door and I would go, and see what he had done and say the same thing. So it was very encouraging because working together meant something, everybody helped everybody.

Of course, it was the perfect training ground — which is not to say we made perfect films. But what do you need to train? Film, a subject, a camera, a man behind the camera, a Nagra and a sound engineer. You don't learn how to light Brigitte Bardot, you learn how nitrate and silver work with rays of light. We could go to the lab and wait for our film to come out of the processors or go to the animation department and watch Bob Verrall work. We could even go to the cafeteria and exchange ideas. The stupid idea of erecting that building which looks like a hospital or a military prison and putting everybody into it, finally produced something: 5 years of miracles — a creative feast.

Cinema Canada: Were there many features made during your years at the Board?

Gilles Carle: Not many. There was *Pour la suite du monde*, Gilles Groulx's *Le chat dans le sac* and *Léopold Z*, all being made around the same time. But before those three there was *Le festin des morts*, and Jacques Godbout did one. And before that, there were different kinds of features — long films made for television that would be shown in 30-minute segments, like *Les brûlés* and *Il était une guerre*. But feature filmmaking never really got started at the NFB, they were always features camouflaged as short films. Fernand Dansereau used to say we were all making 2-hour shorts, and that was true: I started *Léopold Z* as a half-hour film. Groulx started *Le chat dans le sac* thinking it would be long at 45 minutes. We were just filming without thinking about the length. All those films came out as features by chance, I think.

Cinema Canada: What happened to end all that?

Gilles Carle: The direction, the management changed philosophies. They wanted to organize, to plan, to

make things go straight — they wanted to make 'better' films. They didn't know that what was important was not the degree of order, but the degree of disorder which was there. Anarchy is the most important part of the organization in the film business — without anarchy, nothing would be created.

I think the administrators were afraid of us, not only of us but afraid of all the people involved in the arts. We were a notion unknown to these people at the Treasury. We were a different breed, from a different culture, talking about the nice shadows on the walls, the beautiful patterns in the parks, the movements of the girls' legs walking along the beach. And they would say, what the hell are you talking about? You could see it in their faces, sitting at their desks in front of a big painting of the Queen, that horrible painting where she wears that red stripe and the crown. I once met with a few of those people and suddenly I had the impression that they thought of me as a Martian right out of a flying saucer. I said, 'I've got this marvelous idea, I'm going to paint all the trees red, I'm going to paint the water, I'm going to do this and that and...' and they looked at me and said, 'What about the expense accounts?'

It was a traditional incomprehension, a traditional fight between artists and bureaucrats, but the sort of fight that under the right conditions can be very creative, if both groups accept an atmosphere of being part of a family. There's a similar way to hate your brothers and to love them — if the family is creative, you might want to kill the accountant, but you never do. What happened at the Board is that they killed us.

Cinema Canada: What you just described sounds a bit like *Fantastica*.

Gilles Carle: Yes, in a way, because you see, all my ideas for films came to me between the ages of 18 and 25, but I could never sell them. For 15 years I wrote and wrote without having even one idea accepted. Now I am grateful for that because I'm here with them and I can go on making them into films for the next five years — it just takes time to get people to accept your ideas.

Cinema Canada: Was it a difficult decision for you to leave the Board?

Gilles Carle: Not really. Once the new administration was appointed and people started stopping us at the door and asking for I.D.'s and all that, it put an end to our nice situation and everybody left. Well, almost everybody — I think there were 10 or 12 of us. In fact, I was one of the last ones, but I was lost somewhere in the corridors and nobody could find me!... Besides, I hadn't worked for a year and a half, it was a deadlock: they weren't interested in what I wanted to do and I had no interest in their proposals. So, I would go there once a week, collect my cheque and do nothing. Finally I got tired of waiting and I left, even though I had no idea what I was going to do. But when you close the door somewhere, there's always another door that opens somewhere else. No-

body should be afraid of change in this business.

After I had left the Board, I started to feel cheated. What we'd had there could have exploded into something brilliant. We had seen only the first little bang of the beginning and it could have developed tremendously and produced some amazing films. The talent was there, the ideas were there, and the producers were there, but the administrators killed it. Going out into the private sector was like starting all over again.

It's interesting to think of all this now because *Les Plouffe* is a bit like the National Film Board coming down into the centre of Montreal or Quebec City and working in real life, with ideas and actors - that's how I see it. What is the Plouffe family? Why was I so interested in it? It's not just that the story by Roger Lemelin is well written, or that it talks about people I like, or because it re-creates the atmosphere of that period - which, in spite of the temptation, I've tried to avoid clichés. It's because *Les Plouffe* is really a beautiful joining together of documentary and fiction and I can graft 'une fiction sur un documentaire.' And there you have a contradiction: what you create is fiction but it's already there as a sort of document. Simultaneously, it creates your culture, while being born of that culture.

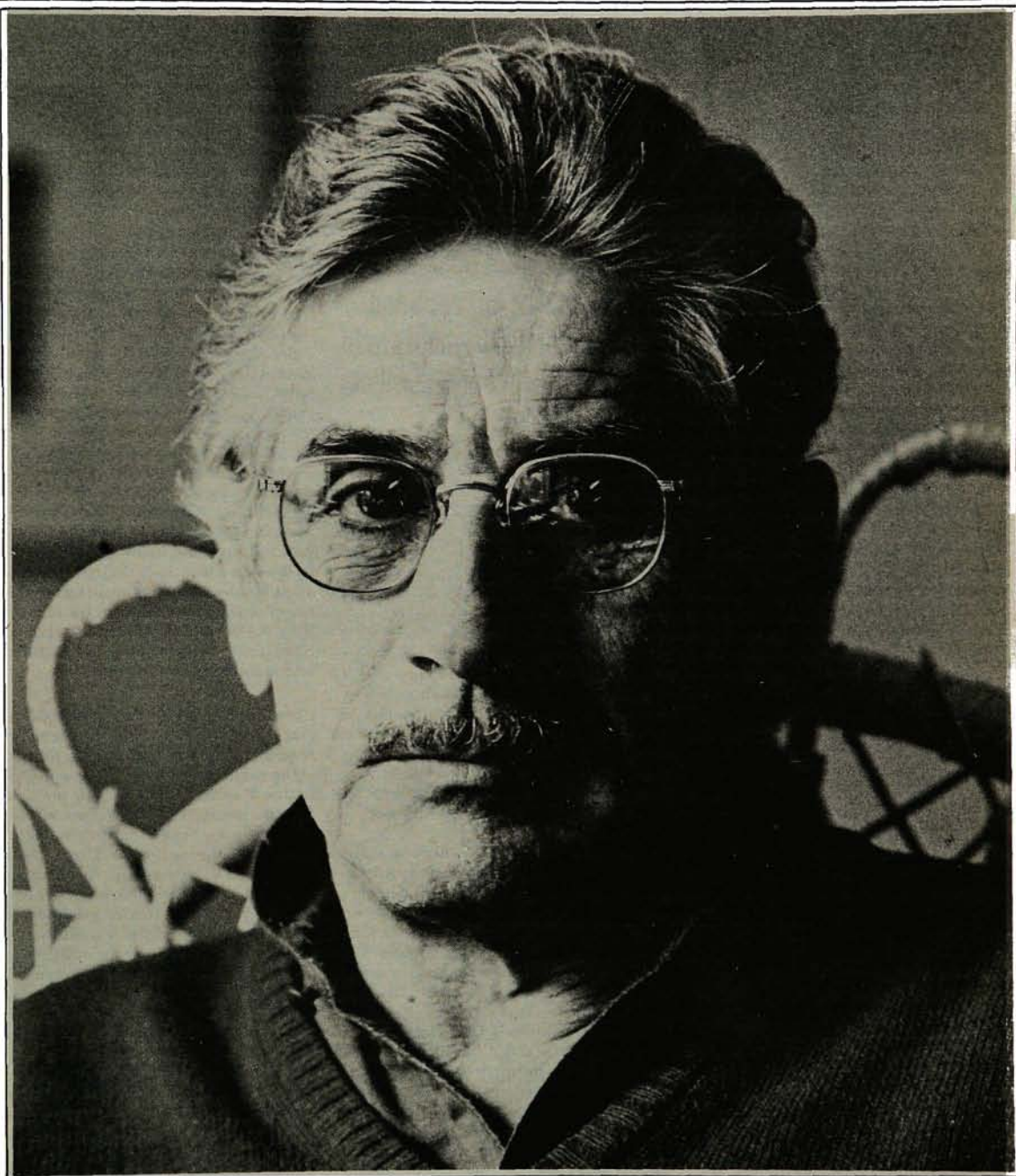
Another thing which I found very useful with *Les Plouffe* was time - I had over four hours to work with. I never knew how to finish my films before, so I dropped them. Somebody would come along and say okay, that's it, we're out of money, and I'd work faster and try to tie things up. It was nice to have more time.

Cinema Canada: How was the length decided on?

Gilles Carle: Well, Denis Héroux was the first one to call me and he asked me if I wanted to do *Les Plouffe*; and I wasn't really very interested because I remembered the television series as being the *All in the Family* of its day: a little cute, well directed, good actors, bad sets and generally, a little old-fashioned. Héroux gave me the script which had been done by Marcel Dubé, but it was mostly a teleplay, not really suitable for a film. You see, at that point *Les Plouffe* was being thought about as a 16mm TV movie, so I said no. Anyway, Héroux persuaded me to read the novel and that was it, I was caught. I thought it was a marvelous novel, active and alive and full of interesting characters. I told Denis that if he were interested in doing it as a feature and if I could re-write the script and work with the author, I'd do it. And that's what happened.

At first, Lemelin was undecided because he wasn't interested in doing what he had already done for television; but by the second re-write, he became very involved because he began to see that the film would finally make it possible to take *Les Plouffe* out of the kitchen and into the streets of the city and the world.

As for the length, the length was already there. We had to do six hours for television because the CBC put up over a



million dollars, and there was no argument about how long the film version would be either. We thought there could be one format for Quebec, another for English Canada and another for the rest of the world, which is the new way to make films. As authors, we either have to accept this idea and keep on making films or reject it and stop working. We have to become what I would call 'collective authors,' not only private authors. It's good to have *Les Plouffe* in Quebec where people will remember their own history; it's good to send it to the rest of Canada in perhaps a shorter version; and it's good to send a version that looks like an international film to the rest of the world. What's important is to know in advance what you are doing. It's like *The Godfather* or *Close*

Encounters of the Third Kind, they knew they would be re-editing and making longer or shorter versions, that's the way it works. I could take any one of the characters in *Les Plouffe* and make another film because they are so true to life, so likeable. In the United States they have *Gone with the Wind*, in France they have *Les misérables*, maybe *Tess* in England, and we have *Les Plouffe*, which is the most popular book ever in Quebec.

I got caught up in it because I felt somehow that I knew about this world. During the shooting I felt that every actor in the film and all the technicians knew about it too - it felt very natural for us Quebecers. I didn't have to say much to the actors or even the extras because they knew what to give, they knew how

to re-live what had happened before them. It was like a little American guy doing *American Graffiti*, there's something in the blood, in the mind, in the chromosomes, in the culture. You see, what's very interesting about *Les Plouffe* is that it starts with individuals, then it becomes collective, it becomes something that deals with the entire nation. And the conflicts which are in the book are the same conflicts in existence today.

Cinema Canada: Will you personally supervise the editing of all the various versions, including TV?

Gilles Carle: Yes. I have the final cut on it - it's all in my contract.

Cinema Canada: How do you explain the high level of interest in this film?

Gilles Carle: I don't know why people are so interested in seeing this film. I suppose it's because of the TV series, which is very dangerous because what we have done is completely different from what was seen on television. The basic characters or archetypes are there but the moral attitude towards the characters is sometimes just the opposite. For example, Ovide - on TV, he was the one people would laugh at, he was the one who would make laughs happen; and Guillaume was the athlete with almost no 'interiority,' always the winner. But these aren't true now. I would never make a film where you laugh at intellectuals or athletes; I've tried to avoid doing that for as long as I can remember, even in a little film I did at the Board a long time ago, *Percé on the Rocks*. It would have been very easy to make cheap jokes about the tourists with all their cameras hanging all over and their multicolored shorts, but I won't do that. Today, the drama that Ovide lives is a serious drama and I don't expect anyone to laugh at him. Some of the situations may be amusing, but I wouldn't do a cliché, all-American college boy comedy where the intellectual wears glasses and is always wrong and being wrong makes him funny.

Instead, we've worked hard at re-creating the atmosphere of the time; not just the physical atmosphere but the moral atmosphere, to take a look at the real attitudes between people. In those days there was a sort of shyness about speaking truly to one another, so they spoke in a sort of underground way. They didn't approach somebody and blurt out the truth - they told a little lie that the other person would understand as the truth. We tried to keep this aspect in both the script and the film because that's what makes those characters interesting: they say nothing important, but they are very important characters. They have a way of asking for a Coca-Cola that's filled with drama. They never say, 'I'm in love' or 'I'm destined to lose' or 'Politics will cause me to suffer,' but they do suffer, they just don't talk about it.

To me, they're very seductive people - very simple yet very complex. And I hope that people will see that the world these characters lived in, Quebec, had an almost perfect, monolithic culture; one which I wouldn't have liked to see continue forever, but which was, nevertheless, a very, very precise culture that was fascinating. We've tried to re-create that accurately while trying to avoid the usual clichés of retro films, where everything 'looks' right but where the moral attitudes are modern and as such, don't fit in. When you start to get that attitude right, you really begin to feel the reality of the period.

Like the war, what did these people think about the war? In most films you see the advent of war as a terrible thing full of danger, right? But here, it was fun. The Plouffe family, living in St-Sauveur, would go and see the St. Lawrence River maybe once every two years, even though they lived only three miles away from it. Now if they don't go and see the docks, they aren't likely to

"...what's very interesting about Les Plouffe is that it starts with individuals, then it becomes collective, it becomes something that deals with the entire nation. And the conflicts which are in the book are the same conflicts in existence today."

give Europe a lot of thought, are they? When the war came it meant jobs. People wouldn't say, oh, but it's terrible to have a war, they would say, I'm going to get a new carpet or a new stove. This unconsciousness they lived is a real drama, because when their own sons had to go the war became very real. I tried to avoid using all stock shots of war in an effort to keep our own point of view from inside Quebec. And here the war was like thunder, far away; but you hear it coming, louder and louder and that's the way I'd like the war to be felt in *Les Plouffe*, like a growing thunder.

Cinema Canada: Earlier you described the Plouffe characters as archetypes, but I wonder if the novel and particularly the TV series didn't create stereotypes, especially in the way they were perceived outside of Quebec?

Gilles Carle: I gave that kind of question some reflection before starting the script and it seems to me they are archetypes: Ovide is Don Quixote and is known throughout literature; Napoléon is Dimitri in the *Brothers Karamazov*, he speaks of love and is ready to break down every door in the city. I would say that the major difference between the TV series and the film is that the series was picturesque while the film tries to make these people familiar. Picturesque means that if you go to Brazil, you film the carnival, you film people with flowers in their hair and the girls are always dancing. But people don't dance all the time. Familiar means that you see people in the bedroom, you see them in their privacy, in their sexuality, in their thinking, in the ways they are religious, things which you don't see when they are shown in a picturesque fashion. My job was to re-stitute the familiar aspect that was in the book and bring it out - take the chance and say that's it, that's what it was, that's how Lemelin saw them.

I would say it's a free adaptation of the book, there is a closeness between the two. It's the book made into a film, trying to keep Roger from forgetting that he's older than he was when he wrote it,

and myself from forgetting that I'm older than I was when I first read it - to keep the passion there. But the big question now is, how will *Les Plouffe* be received elsewhere?

Cinema Canada: When we last spoke, you told me you would never want to work from a novel whose author was dead. Could you explain that?

Gilles Carle: I think it would be very difficult to work without the author because if you take the book alone and not what the author forgot to put into the book, then you're missing something. When I worked with Roger, I didn't need him to tell me about the book, I needed him to work around the book because he remembered a lot of things about that time in St-Sauveur, things which were necessary for me to know. I needed to know these things to put more into the film than there was in the book: lots of little things, like how you entered a house, or how introductions were handled, generally things which aren't said in a book but have to be done in a film. I needed to remember all those elements of life and fortunately Roger is a living memory of those times. He's like Willie Lamothe, the sort of guy who never forgets anything - they're very handy to have around.

Cinema Canada: You also told me that *Les Plouffe* would probably be recognizable as a Gilles Carle film but at the same time, you hoped it wouldn't.

Gilles Carle: And that still goes. It's strange, because the story comes from a novel, yet the first two or three actors who read the script said, 'Oh, Jesus Christ, that's Carle again.' And that surprised me and scared me a bit, so I tried to put myself at the service of something that existed before me, something that was there as a part of our culture and something that is no longer owned by Lemelin - it's owned by the people. I tried to think about the *mise en scene* and being true to the whole thing; but can you forget yourself that much? You suddenly see a few gags in there and you say... I just hope that it won't be seen as Gilles Carle playing around with *Les Plouffe*.

Cinema Canada: In an interview you gave in 1977, you said, "I reject films that seem profound because they deal with one reality." Does *Les Plouffe* deal with more than one?

Gilles Carle: Well, first I should explain what I meant when I said that. When you succeed in making a film which is profound, then I think you have achieved something. I get a little uneasy watching people constantly making efforts to push some big drama that was established at the beginning of the film. To me, it's a bit like watching Bergman's films; you're in a theatre watching little bourgeois people biting each other, going at each other psychologically, making every possible effort to achieve what has been decided by Bergman as the big drama.

But what I would like to know about is not so much the 'big drama,' as whether

these characters smoke after having lunch in a restaurant; or when they are having a simple affair, what happens? Do they go and see the Sistine Chapel when they visit Rome? I like this light aspect of people and I like it even more when those light aspects end up looking like some big, terrible drama. Why? Because that's closer to our own lives. We are talking now. This morning I had an espresso, a boiled egg and some magnificent bread. I come to the studio in the afternoon, mix the sound and have fun. Later I'll meet my girl friend, tonight I'll go and see a play and perhaps afterwards I'll go and have some wine on Prince Arthur. You can't say this is such a bad life, right? But if I think in terms of five years, then it's bad drama. The contradiction is how the addition of all those little, happy moments can come out looking like big drama. That's the contradiction of modern life and I would like *Les Plouffe* to be a little like this: I would like the drama to be unfelt until after the film is over.

Cinema Canada: When you left the National Film Board, you became involved in Onyx Films, then left there and formed Carle-Lamy Productions, with Pierre Lamy, and now you work independently. Why did Carle-Lamy Productions stop producing?

Gilles Carle: We put an end to Carle-Lamy mostly because I was tired, tired of making too many films to fill up holes in the budgets of other films. It would work like this: 'Gilles, we're \$75,000 in the hole so we have to do a few commercials.' And I would do a few commercials, fill the hole in one budget and start working on a feature: it was a lot of work and the problem was that it was a lot of time spent doing stupid things. Between Pierre and me, we must have spent \$400,000-\$500,000 that we made from the company and put back into films, but it couldn't go on forever. So I said, that's it, I'm leaving; I am no longer interested in trying to save Québecois filmmaking, I'm going back to worrying about my own filmmaking.

Besides, by then the CFDC was there and L'Institut québécois du cinéma was in the planning; other forms of assistance were available so Carle-Lamy was no longer needed - and certainly I had no need to continue doing that. I must have done about 300 commercials, which I don't regret because they had some value and they helped make a lot of films, but if I had it to do over again, I'd give it a great deal more thought and probably not do it. For a while, I imagined the whole world of filmmaking collapsing around me and I was there trying to help salvage it.

Cinema Canada: How would you describe your relations with film critics?

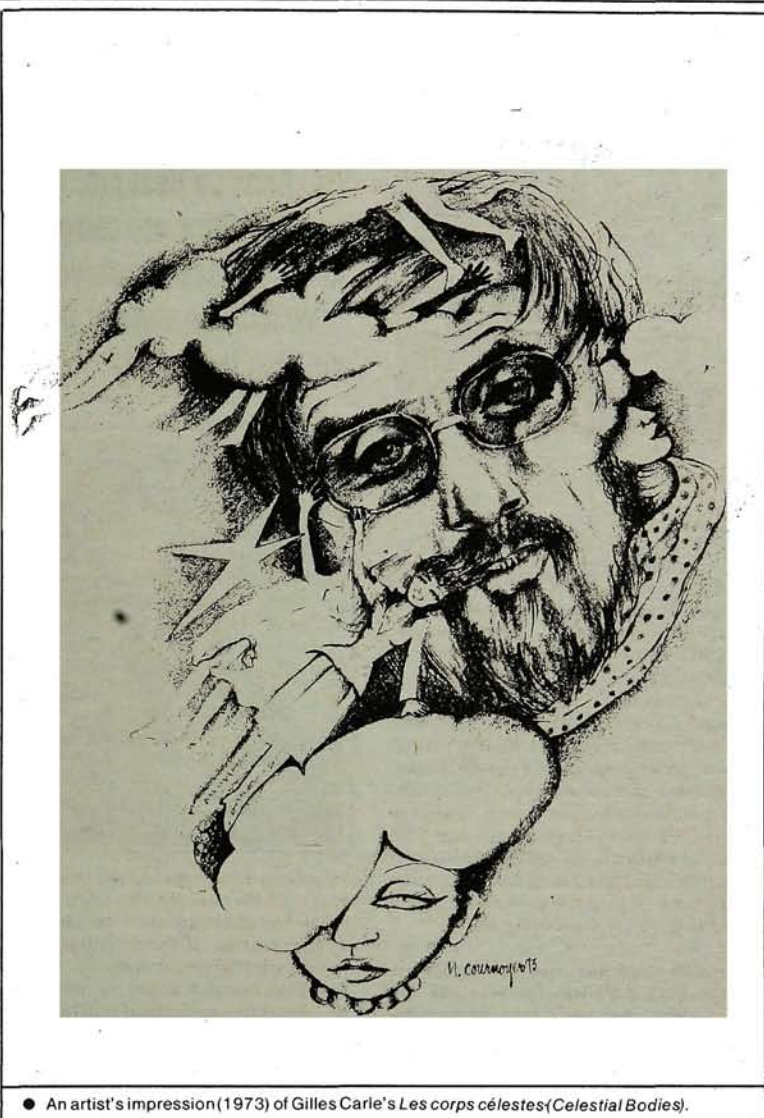
Gilles Carle: Well, my relations with Quebec critics are not very good; my relations with the Canadian critics are a bit unbelievable; and my relations with critics in general are not too positive. And I feel a little bad about this situation because I feel that a serious review is as important as the film itself. Without

a critical response, a film doesn't exist in a way - it's like a man without a woman or a child without a mother. What is very creative, of course, is when there is a certain kind of tension between the two. You are better off with a bad review for all the right reasons than a good one for all the wrong reasons. That's the worst thing that can happen to you because you feel cheated - and that's the way I feel.

I know when my films have been appreciated because I get letters from people: sometimes they come ten years after I've made the film. I used to get letters about *Léopold Z*, and *The Rape of a Sweet Young Girl*, and now I'm getting responses to *The True Nature of Bernadette* but they're so many years late. It's the same with the critics, they're always at least one film behind. Five years from now they'll be talking about *The Angel and the Woman* because that film destroys nationalism, which is why it was so hated here. But I feel I can film a guy shovelling snow for the sheer beauty of it, I don't have to say how much he earns an hour. When you make a science fiction film do you have to say what the pilot's salary is? I did *The Angel and the Woman* for the sheer beauty of white snow, which to me is like a canvas on which you paint. *Fantastica* was the same thing. But that attitude has been completely rejected in Quebec, just like the attitude I expressed in *Léopold Z* was rejected in its time. Today, if you're not sociological, you're nothing. But if you think about it, what was Charlie Chaplin doing during the first World War? He was making *Charlie Makes Sausages* - not very exciting, not very sociological, but absolutely marvelous. So I'm sort of pleading for the freedom to get away from the usual ideas, away from what is fashionable in the intellectual world.

When I shot *The Angel and the Woman*, I knew I was going to be completely destroyed by the critics, I knew in advance. I expected it and I wasn't surprised; but I'd like to be surprised once in a while. I looked through the reviews for a little caption that said something good about the film - and you know how easy it is to do that: they say, 'This film is far from brilliant,' and you take out the 'brilliant' and surround it with dots, '... brilliant...' - and I couldn't even find that.

Then one day I learned that the same film had won a critics' award in Europe - and it forces you to ask yourself some questions: why is that your own people are so hard on you and see things in a film that are totally different from what audiences in Europe have seen? In Europe, they saw a dialogue between two people, between reality and unreality, between a true woman and a man who is an angel. But here they talk about the sex in the film. However, it's not because there's sex in a film that it is a sex film - people have a tendency to take one scene and make it the whole film. When I did the sex scene in *The Angel and the Woman*, I shot it for real and in the most beautiful way I could. And just before I did that, I shot an eating scene in complete silence, except



● An artist's impression (1973) of Gilles Carle's *Les corps célestes* (Celestial Bodies).

for a few little background noises. This is the equivalent, isn't it? Yet nobody noticed that - they noticed the sex and forget about the supper, which makes me think people are hungry for sex.

Cinema Canada: *The budget for Les Plouffe was five million and for The Angel and the Woman, it was...*

Gilles Carle: ...\$25,000. And it was the perfect experience. I'm very naive sometimes and I thought to myself, fantastic: I've just made this film and the Festival de la Critique Québécoise is about to begin. Of course, I'll be invited with my little 16mm black-and-white film because it's the kind of film they should be interested in.

We had bought the camera ourselves, processed the film in the basement with a machine we bought for \$300 - we would stand there waiting with a flashlight to look at the quality; Ron Hallis, François Protat and I did the optical transfers. Fifteen people had done the whole thing. And the Festival? They didn't even want to look at it. Ottawa came to look at it for Cannes and they came out after 10 minutes and wouldn't even talk to me. I felt very strange about

the whole experience - I kept asking myself, who have I hurt? Finally I started to discover that my new ideas for filmmaking were reaching people the wrong way. It was as if I were trying to destroy people's ideas about films. The critics destroyed the film as I had predicted and the only positive response it got was from a couple of people who wrote letters to *Le Devoir* saying how much they had enjoyed the film.

I felt bad, not because of the critics, but because I couldn't help thinking about the people who had worked with me for no pay. When we learned the film won an award in Europe, I felt slightly relieved of some of the guilt I felt about having put all the other people through this experience. I felt that with the award, at least they wouldn't feel they had worked for nothing. And I still think it's one of my best films.

Sometimes in my films, like in *Fantastica*, I feel almost like a painter and a musician. At the same time, when people see films like this, they are a little unsatisfied because it's a bit like dreaming and never waking up. You have to wake up to appreciate your dream. And particularly with *Fantastica*, there is no

apparent moment when you wake up, so in a lot of ways it couldn't be appreciated. I would like to be able to speak like a filmmaker and not like a phoney scientist or a phoney sociologist or a phoney anything. There are two films that I've been impressed with in the last few years, *Nashville* and *Apocalypse Now*, because Altman and Coppola talk like filmmakers. They don't talk like novelists or anything else; they use the language of film. What do we have to work with? Colors, music, the sounds of words, documents, images, painting and movement. But people are so deeply into the literary world that they would like us to keep on talking like a novel, complete with chapters - and this I don't agree with.

Cinema Canada: *Yesterday I told someone I was coming to interview you and he said, "Carle is the greatest film director this country has produced." Although I didn't pursue the point, I suspect that by "country," this person was referring to Canada. Do you accept this idea?*

Gilles Carle: I feel that it's probably wrong. First, this country stands for a few things that are not only unacceptable, but impossible. Let's take this country as an idea, because it's only an idea, not a country. This idea which is called Canada would like you to make certain kinds of films which are impossible - you cannot make bi-cultural films and you cannot make bilingual films. You're from one culture, from one nation, not from one country. When I do a film here, I do it in French and I do it as a Quebecois because I'm a part of this culture. Afterwards, I live in a country called Canada which I can accept or not accept. No matter where I shoot a film, I will still be a Quebecois shooting that film because the culture is the oxygen of the soul, it is the most important thing in life.

So when you say Gilles Carle is the best filmmaker in Canada, that's from the outside where people can see anything they want to see. From inside myself, I can only define myself as a Quebec filmmaker who is sold to Canada. Not that I am a nationalist because I'm not. I hate nationalism. Being a Quebecois does not make you better than being a Canadian or an Italian guy in Pittsburgh. But the fact remains that you cannot be from two cultures just like you can't have two mothers.

Cinema Canada: *But that culture can have two elements. It seems to me that there is no big deal made of the fact that Lewis Furey's character in Fantastica speaks English.*

Gilles Carle: No, it's simply there, the way I like English people to be here in Quebec. If Quebec has to become monolithic and not pluralist, if this government or any government here decides that to be a Quebecer you have to be Catholic and French, then I'll leave because the whole idea is horrible. Freedom for people first. The songs are in English, Lewis is English and that's it. I didn't want it to stand out, but what I loved about the reviews of *Fantastica*

INTERVIEW



was that nobody pointed it out. If only people would look at the sex in my films the same way. (Laughs)

Cinema Canada: *Yet in an interview you gave in 1977, you said that in your early films there was always a bit of the idea "Québec d'abord."*

Gilles Carle: Well, at first, with *Léopold Z*, we were trying to put forward what you could call the Quebec culture — what the original Quebec culture was. But then you feel you've succeeded a bit at that and so you start to ask yourself questions about what that Quebec culture is and what it should be. When you start to answer that question, you begin to realize that it shouldn't be only one thing — it should be rich and full of everything.

If Quebec culture is only what was in *Léopold Z*, then I don't want to live here anymore. If it's only what I've shown in *The Rape of a Sweet Young Girl*, I don't want to live here anymore. You go on thinking and you get to the point where you want to help develop new aspects, new paths to follow. In *The Angel and the Woman*, you see the results: let's dream a little bit. We have to bring back the dream because it's nourishing. So I'm trying to make new kinds of films that try to say what I did in *Léopold Z*... it is only one little accurate aspect of Quebec culture.

Cinema Canada: *In that same interview, you went on to say that the election of the Parti Québécois in '76 brought about a change in people's psychology and that it was no longer necessary to have Quebec first and foremost, now the audience would perhaps be able to see a film as a film.*

Gilles Carle: Yes, something changed but I don't think it was the fact that the P. Q. came into power because the P. Q. is only a switch from the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie to the French-speaking bourgeoisie. What really made the difference to us was the passage of the language law because that was very, very important to this people.

It's not, as some people have said, a surprising or racist law. It's happened almost everywhere: it happened in Texas, in California and in Manitoba in 1905. The first thing they did was make English legal, right? It's a big change because you no longer feel in danger when you can use your own language the way, let's say, the Swedes do. It gives

you a sense of security and it's a nice feeling. It's not against other people.

It's important in the way that there are three levels of language. The way you speak speaks of the place you come from. And the emotions which are conveyed by the words you use is what makes it so difficult in another language. I'm speaking English now and it's difficult, not only to convey ideas, but also to convey the kinds of emotions that I might like you to read through my language. Then there is the rational level, the words which are said and they mean precise things. Language is very important in that way, too. If you don't let people talk their own language, you're not only destroying their freedom of expression, but the freedom of emotions and the freedom of the place you come from to be part of the world. And that's a terrible thing to do.

Cinema Canada: *Some critics seemed to feel that Fantastica was the end of a cycle for you; that in the film you were, in a way, exorcising the devils that are to be found in your work. Were you surprised at the reaction to Fantastica?*

Gilles Carle: Maybe it is, I don't really know. But I was surprised by one thing: I used to tell myself that the critics had no eyes, and now I say they have no eyes and no ears — and the problem was that I made a film for the eyes and the ears. How do you explain Lewis (Furey) being nominated in Toronto as the Best Actor and no mention of the music?

I was trying to put something on the screen in a secret sort of way and I can understand why people didn't see it, because maybe it was too secret. Anyway, I've re-edited the beginning, the end, and some other parts of the film, and a new version of *Fantastica* will be released in English. I don't know if the film will be better or not but it will be more like the film I wanted to make. Unfortunately, I was laid up with an ear problem while the film was being edited in Paris, and even though it's not his fault, I think the editor was left alone too long. When I saw the film I wanted to re-edit it right then and there; but in the meantime, they had come from the Cannes Film Festival and accepted it immediately. Really, it's a long story and one I'd rather not go into.

The point is that I treated the film as a series of paintings, something very dif-

"I like to go to Cannes because when you are a filmmaker, or involved in film, it's like going to a village where you know everybody—it could be Ste. Anne de Beaupré: you have the water, you can go for a swim, you see people you know and you wave at them and stop for a chat"



ferent. My idea was to take real people and treat them as theatre people, while doing just the opposite with the theatre group; so that at the end, the process would have been completely reversed. But that doesn't show as much as I wanted it to — perhaps it will be clearer in the new version.

Cinema Canada: *Did you conceive the musical sequences after hearing the music?*

Gilles Carle: No, before. I developed an idea of what I wanted to put on the screen and I wrote a sort of mini-opera. I gave that to Lewis with some ideas about what I wanted and he rewrote it completely, making it his own. But the three women are there, and lots of other things. But it's his music.

Cinema Canada: *What's interesting about the critical response to your work in general is that while the critics never seem to like a particular film, they take your work as a director very seriously.*

Gilles Carle: The first wave of reviews is sort of total destruction. If I were to take them seriously, I'd say, 'Oh my God, I've missed again.' But little things start to happen, so instead I say let's wait and see, and things usually start to pick up. If you make a film sincerely, even if you miss — and I don't claim that I haven't missed — there's always a response somewhere, and it often comes from the least expected place.

The fact that I am a film director is not that important I don't push the idea that my films are good or not good, because I don't care that much. What I care a lot

about is whether they are true to life. If somebody looks at them carefully, will he learn something from them? Will they be seen as objects that people can use to start thinking for their own good, about their own lives, and as a result of this thinking, do something? My films are de-culturalizing; in their own little way they destroy the patterns of what's going on — at least, that's what I would like them to do. I want people to feel frustrated at the end of my films, to feel even a little angry at me. But at the same time, I want people to feel like doing something about their lives. After all, my films are a call to destroy big institutions and to do something as individuals. The characters I have created are always trying to do something about their own lives — they may not succeed but it's important to try.

Cinema Canada: *Other critics point to your work as being full of potential, and speak of you as being 'near great,' approaching it, not yet having realized the potential.*

Gilles Carle: It could be true, but I don't want to be a great filmmaker. In fact, I think the whole idea of being a great filmmaker is stupid. Nobody considers themselves to be a great filmmaker. You just do your job, you make films. There are so many films that I used to consider great, but when I see them today, they look like nothing; so you just don't know. Let the people of the future decide about the future and we'll decide about the present. Our only real potential is that we do things that we think are sincere and true — of course, we also have to think that they are important or we wouldn't do them. Everytime I make a film, I think I'm creating a masterpiece — it's like being a painter. It's hard for me to imagine a painter working on a canvas and saying to himself, now we'll see something disgusting. What we achieve is something else and that's hard to know. I used to think other people knew more about that than I did myself, but now I'm not so sure. Something develops in the process and it's a bit like the process of life itself: things are rejected, but life goes on. Maybe I haven't quite made it, maybe I won't ever make it, maybe someday people will think I've made it and that won't be true. Maybe I've already made it and nobody knows. What can I say — it's only the talk of the town.



Where Canadian film
comes together.

BELLEVUE *Pathé*

MONTREAL
Motion Picture Laboratories
& Sound Studios
André Collette, President
2000 Northcliff Ave.
Montreal, Quebec
H4A 3K5
Tel: (514) 484-1186

TORONTO
720 King St. West
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 2T3
Tel: (416) 364-3894

**PATHÉ SOUND &
POST PRODUCTION CENTRE**
Joe Grimaldi, vice-president
121 St. Patrick St.,
Toronto, Ontario M5T 1V3
Tél: (416) 598-2521

A DIVISION OF
ASTRAL BELLEVUE *Pathé*
LIMITED

FILMPLAN
INTERNATIONAL

PIERRE DAVID / VICTOR SOLNICKI / CLAUDE HÉROUX

Mutual Films Corporation
is pleased to announce that
Filmplan International's production
of **THE FRIGHT** has been acquired
for worldwide distribution by
Twentieth Century-Fox



225 ROY STREET EAST, MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA H2W 1M5 TEL: (514) 845-5211 TELEX: 05-27238
2 ELGIN AVENUE, TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA M5R 2G6 TEL: (416) 922-3168