

BILL FRUET'S WEDDING IN WHITE



Bill Fruet on writing:

"I write everything longhand. I've learned to make the quickest possible notation – to fill in the blanks later. I sued to try to work in all the detail from the beginning. Of course you do two pages and then dry up. You've lost the whole idea, you've lost the essence. Better to get ideas down quickly; you can always pick them up again and develop them later."

"To me writing is just hell. I guess all writers go through this. I like big rooms, I prefer other people's apartments, strange places. (I used Shebib's apartment to write *Rip-Off*. Also started writing *OUT* there. He thought I was writing *RIP-OFF* and I was writing *Out*.) I find that all the outlets start to function in my body: physically! I have to take a crap every ten minutes, I really do. I have to eat – I am up and down – I can't sit – I spend half my time standing there making notes. I don't have any particular hours. I have to eat, I have to reward myself constantly, I have to pamper myself. Writing is the hardest work in the world for me."

On directing:

"Well, I didn't realize that a lot of areas were my responsibility. I felt that they would take care of themselves. On a proper set they would have worked, they should have. If everybody had the right attitude. I had to keep telling the crew what to do – they don't have to take any responsibility at all. And they're all supposed to be some sort of experts! If

you have to keep telling them what to do, it doesn't leave you much time to do your work. One would hope that you'd have a little time to spend with the actors, blocking the picture, and not have to keep worrying about *their* jobs! (Read about Fruet's hassles with IATSE elsewhere in this issue.)

On writing *and* directing:

"I don't think every writer should direct his own work, not unless he's familiar with the medium he's working in. But certainly who knows better than the writer what he started out with, and what he wants to get? I think that the writer is the most neglected creative artist, regarding production. He should be given much more say in the production of his work, because after all, my god, without him there isn't anything to start with. It's his work, he really conceives the whole thing, it's his imagination that comes out with it. Everybody else, I know, contributes; but the writer is the seed where it all comes from, and yet he is usually given the least amount of control in the end. Many writers just howl with pain when they see what happens to their work on the stage or the screen."

On European directors:

"Antonioni's European films, I sued to cringe at them. Monica Vitti, she may be a great chick, but I don't want to watch her for a block while she comes toward the camera, and

another bloody block while she walks away from the camera. But I liked both of his American pictures, BLOW-UP and ZABRISKIE POINT. Zabriskie was so far out, you couldn't help, but like it. It was great!

I am not a big Godard man – that whole simple form bores the shit out of me.

But if I could ever have half the imagination that Fellini has! He's my idol, there's nobody quite like him. What a film-maker! He never leaves you a second in the film where he doesn't entertain you, or keep you busy. If he must get to the other side of the room, he gives you lots of things to watch while the camera goes over there."

William Fruet was born in Lethbridge, Alberta, where the story of WEDDING IN WHITE actually took place. (Another feature Fruet wrote the screenplay for, called OUT, is currently being filmed there by David Acoma, and Jim Margellos.) Fruet left Alberta when he was eighteen or nineteen. He was in a drama festival, aspiring to be an actor. He won several scholarships, went to the Banff School of Fine Arts for a summer. Discovered a whole new world, culture and art, which he was totally unaware of living in a small town in the West. Out of school for a while, he worked as a photographer, but then accepted another scholarship and came to Toronto. Studied at the Canadian Theatre School, "a little old school that used to be on College Street." He attended for a couple of years, then tried to get acting jobs. "I did quite a bit of work in early television, with all the pioneers in the business. It was a very exciting time. God, there used to be two or three plays a night, at least ten plays a week, minimum. All live productions. It was very exciting." He spent six or seven years doing that, fiddled around with writing at the same time. He also worked as a photographer, and did a lot of little jobs, because he wasn't making enough money to live on as an actor. "Lots of work, but they weren't paying too much money. Then in 1960, I got what was considered a very good, big part in THE DRYLANDERS, Canada's first big feature film. Donald Haldane directed it. Unfortunately it didn't turn out to be much of a movie." "In the meantime, I had some success writing. I started co-writing with Sandy Sterne, who is a successful writer now in Hollywood. We started writing some TV scripts together. He was going to study medicine at the time, so we wrote this series about an intern, very good, but the CBC refused it. A year later Ben Casey and Dr. Kildare became hits on the U.S. networks." "I started to wander around, things got dull here, the whole CBC started to close up, all drama productions wrapped. So I went to California, and spent three years working for a couple of small TV companies, in all capacities. Still photographer, writer, cameraman, you name it – on industrial films, PR films, commercials." "In L.A. I really found myself behind the camera – hooked on production. I wanted to start making films. Made a few 16mm films with some actors, but there was no place to take them at the time. Went to a summer session in filmmaking at UCLA – did some film editing. Shebib was there at the same time – working nights, finishing a thesis, and I was working days. Using the same building. I just heard about the guy, never met him. He was a surf freak, and used to go zoom all over on his skate board. He was like a big kid." "I bummed for a year on the beach, had a little cottage – did a lot of writing. *Wedding in White* was started there. Strangely enough I really got into Canada in California. Because being in a totally different society, I could really reflect back – remember, and appreciate things more. I got to really appreciate Canada and made my decision to come back, I didn't do that well there, anyway, couldn't really get off the ground, so to speak. Not in the film business. Met a lot of nice people, but I knew if I was ever going to make it it would probably be back here." "Came back in 1965 and tried to get something going on my own – a small film business. I tried to capitalize on everything I learned down there. It was just impossible. Tried to approach pharmaceutical firms to make PR films. When I left there were 20 Canadian owned drug firms up here. When I came back, there were only two left." "When I was down there I had a great admiration for these U.S. industrialists. But I knew that Canada would be the next land they would conquer. It really affected me, when I saw it actually happening. It frightened me. And they don't make PR films in Canada, they bring them up from the U.S., and that personally hurt me." "In desperation I took a job as a CBC film assistant, and rapidly worked my way up in five years. Met Shebib on the Weekend show. When I saw his California thing, I really liked what I saw, figured this is the guy I'd like to connect with. It worked out very well, obviously."

Don Shebib asked Fruet to write the screenplay for this film he was



Bill Fruet (upper right) directing a scene

going to do on Maritimers. They worked very hard together for two years, with almost no money, and came up with GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD, which is now a classic of Canadian cinema. Fruet also wrote the screenplay for Shebib's second feature film, RIP-OFF, and which played to mixed reviews in Toronto and other major Canadian cities, and is scheduled for U.S. release soon. Fruet's connection with Shebib certainly did pay off, since it enabled him to write the scripts for OUT, as well as WEDDING IN WHITE, and the opportunity to direct the latter.

"We're probably better friends, than co-workers. We fight like hell when we work together, but it's a healthy fight. With Shebib it's open all the way, we can curse each other out, but it's always to the good."

"Even RIP-OFF would have payed off more, had we more time. Just near the end we started to get it. The same things were happening with GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD. We had a lot of trouble with Goin' Down the Road for a long time, and suddenly, it was like a revelation, one night we struck it – wham! wham! the whole thing went together! It was about to happen with Rip-Off – there are fragments in the picture – we started to get going in the right direction." "It's a good enough picture, I just think it should have been marketed differently – publicized, put into the drive-ins in the first place. It's this Great Canadian Picture crap! Everything has to be evaluated on the same level here. It wasn't that kind of picture. I think we could have made that kind of picture, with a little more time. Don and I do work very well together!"

WEDDING IN WHITE was originally written as a stage play. It was produced at the Poor Alex Theatre in Toronto this past winter, under a government grant. Doug McGrath, one of the stars, directed the stage version, and Paul Bradley, Doris Petric, and Leo Phillips also appeared in it. They are recreating their stage roles in the film.

The story takes place in 1943, somewhere in Western Canada. (Lethbridge, Alberta?) In the film the location is totally unspecified. It concerns soldiers returning home from the war, the old men in the town always reliving their war experiences, and the women acting as pawns in the men's game of military memories. Leo Phillips and Doris Petric play the parents of Paul Bradley and Carol Kane. Doug McGrath is Paul's buddy, whom he brings home from the war, and who gets his sister pregnant by raping her. Donald Pleasance, the world renowned British actor, plays an old war-buddy of Leo's. They drink beer together, reminisce, and attend Legion get-togethers. Leo wants to

disown his daughter, but Donald Pleasance offers to marry her, even though he could be her grandfather. It's a sad, pathetic story, which Fruet claims actually happened, very sensitively written. Full of insights about a young girl's coming of age, about the world of veterans, about women dominated to the point of brutality by the men they live with; and full of nostalgia about the Canadian way of life in the forties; not the drippy, good-old-days kind of nostalgia, but a long, hard look at what those days were actually like.

The filming of *WEDDING IN WHITE* took place in a decrepit Toronto alley, called Jersey Avenue, near Christie Pitts. Fruet found an old house on its last legs that he thought was perfect as the location. Most of it was shot in that house, crammed to the attic with cables, lights, tripods, dollies, props and costumes, old furniture, mementoes, actors and production people. The crew could hardly move, and there were some flare-ups. We were allowed on the set, but couldn't do an interview there, because of lack of space. Besides, mustachioed, longhaired Fruet was too busy making his debut as a film director. We managed to catch up with him shortly after filming ended, in a Yorkville coffee house.

WEDDING IN WHITE, directed by William Fruet. Director of Photography, Richard Leiterman. Produced by John Vidette, Dermot Films. Cast: Donald Pleasance, Doris Petrie, Carol Kane, Paul Bradley, Doug McGrath, and Leo Phillips. Shot in 35mm Eastmancolor, using Panavision, during May/June 1972 in Toronto. Produced with the assistance of the CFDC, Canadian distributor, Cinepix - U.S. distributor, Joseph E. Levine. Production has IATSE crew - Don Buschbaum, production manager; John Board, first assistant director; Peter Luxford, assistant cameraman; George Mulholland, soundman; Tony Lower, editor.

How did you go about getting Donald Pleasance?

"It sort of came about as a joke. John (John Vidette, the producer) asked me who I would really like for a star, and I said give me Alec Guinness, or better yet, get me Donald Pleasance. And we caught him at a good moment, just when a Broadway show that he was in closed. John got in touch with him, gave him the script, he liked it very much, and we started negotiations."

How did you get him into a \$275,000 budget?

"Purely on the merits of the script. Also, he wanted to work with somebody, who was young and new. I corresponded with him a little bit, and he said how much he liked the script, the full quality, the simplicity of it, and we got him for a fraction of what he usually gets." "To get him for this picture was so exciting. At first I was naturally a little bit worried, being my first picture, and going to work with a man like this. But right from the first moment, he was professional and considerate, almost as if he knew the circumstances. He put me at ease right away and it was a nice relationship. We talked things over. The man never stops working. Always working, working, working. He's sitting there, and you just think he's sitting in the sun, but he's working on his character, working on details every minute, just little things."

He set the standard for the other actors. He brought them all up to his level. Particularly Doris Petrie, who plays right opposite him. She has the toughest job, and she has lots of moments that are all hers. I mean she's not one step behind, she's right there, a tremendous actress. This role should really make her in this country as an actress. She's been kicking around a long time, you know. I saw her in a Factory Lab production of a terrible play, but there were a couple of moments when Doris Petrie just stood right out, she was just

so fantastic. And I knew that she was the one to do the mother then and I had already cast the play though, so she got another part, but I always had her in mind for the mother."

What prompted you to bring Bradley and McGrath together again?

I've always said that Doug is a fine actor, one of the best in the country. And Paul has come a long way since *Goin' Down the Road*. He cut his teeth in that picture. Well actually, the stage play was where he started to get good reviews. It was like watching him go through *Goin' Down the Road* all over again, but he did it and he did a good job. By the end, he was one of the strongest things in the show. On opening night, though, he was like a piece of wood, he just froze delivering his lines. But by the end, he had it. The guy's a great showman, he's destined to go all the way. He's got quality, he's got timing. I just wanted to bring them together again, in the feature, because they're both ideal for the roles."

I saw the play, really liked it, but I find it hard to visualize it on film, because of the limitations of a single location for the most part.

"My feeling was that the medium of film would be better for it, because I felt that a lot of the moments required more subtlety, than you can do on stage. Some of the lines are very quiet, very moving, and to get that across to a whole group of people, you're very restricted on stage. There's a lot you can say with a close-up and silence, that you can't say on stage with someone just standing there. I don't think I'm wrong, judging from the rushes. Some moments are particularly



QUEBEC FILM LABS

For all your Eastmancolor
or Ektachrome
developing or printing
needs.

35 mm - 16 mm - Super 8 mm

CONTACT

DAVID BIER

265 VITRE STREET W.
MONTREAL, QUEBEC

514 - 861 - 5483

moving. When Sarah comes over to ask about Sandy, the poor old woman just finding out that her man is actually going to marry this young girl, it's smashing, it just moves you to tears. When Mary (Doris Petrie) talks about the past, about their wedding, about the kind of life they've had, Doris underplays it beautifully. And old Jim (Donald Pleasence) would be so easy to caricature, but Pleasence was always fighting this, he could have gotten carried away so easily. He's gotten it across so much better by underplaying it – he's believable. And again this is the difference between the stage and film: on stage you want something big and grand, but on film you don't do it. You underplay it in a very subtle way, and it's much more effective."

I saw the play the night after we went to see a really fine film by Barbara Loden, called WANDA. It explored the plight of a woman being dominated by a man. Maybe this is why I saw WEDDING IN WHITE as a mirror to a male chauvinistic society where females are subjugated and have to play out all these roles men define for them. It's a women's lib play, in that sense.

"Right, I see how they could connect with it very easily. Jeannie, the girl, is an object in the household. A late child. So many kids, when I was young, had parents that were really, really old. They were like my grandparents. And the kids were just accidents. They didn't really belong in the household. Not to even have real parents, a situation with any kind of love in it. I knew a boy, strange enough, very much like Jeannie. A pathetic creature, a very late child. His parents considered him a nuisance, because just when they had all their children grown up, along came this damn kid! Times were hard, and I guess people really looked forward to having their children grown up, so they could sit back, and not have to start all over again.

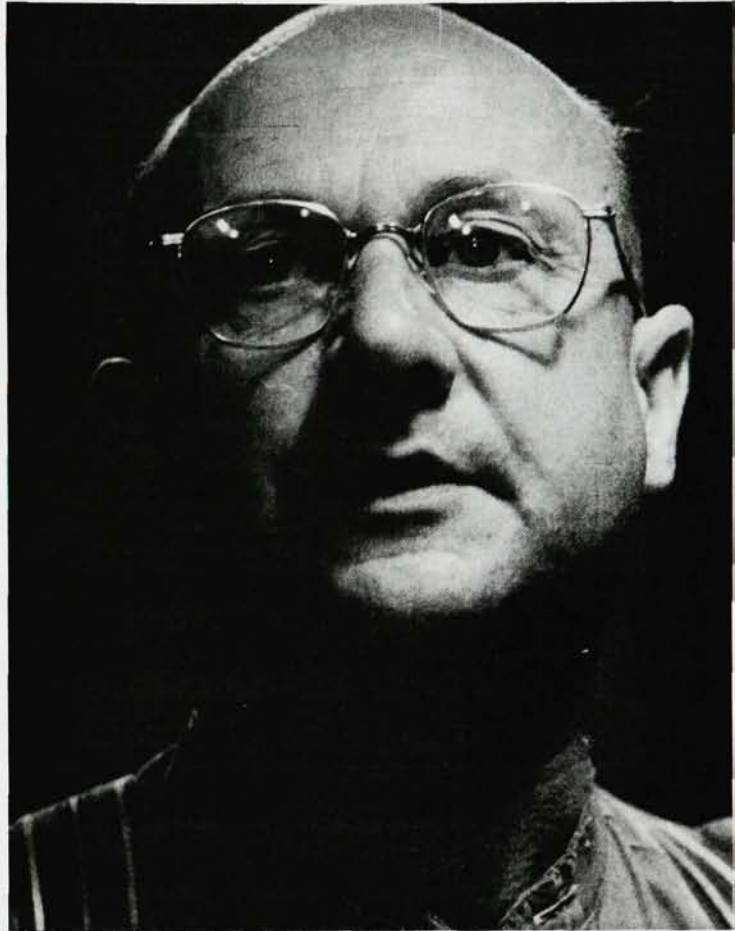
When you were writing it, then, were you fully conscious of this dichotomy in the story between a male-oriented society and the role of the female?

"Oh yes. I grew up among so many little old fat ladies who made cookies and shortening bread. And their husbands, god, all the same, spent their whole bloody pay cheque down at the bloody beer hall. There was never enough money. The little old ladies always bought their clothes at rummage sales. I grew up in a whole section of town, the wrong side of the tracks, the North end, as corny as it sounds, but it was composed of a lot of people like this. I was very young, and the whole business of speech and dialect – I don't even know how I really remember it – god, it's been years and years, twenty-five years at least. And yet when I started writing it – it's all just exactly the way they talked – it just poured out very easily. These women and the way they felt, and that whole drinking mentality, made such an impression on me. And I have no use for this kind of existence, I detested it all, even back then. I don't want to generalize, because the Legion today is not what the Legion was in those days. Beer parlors have changed too, we've finally started to open our doors and let young people drink together. To enjoy it the way it should be enjoyed. And not that whole atmosphere, the smell of the disinfectant and the bloody tile walls, painted green, and these old men just sitting there drinking their minds into a dull stupor, staring blankly at a spot on the wall. It's all going, thank god, but it's everything I remember from the West. I remember my mother and father on a Saturday night going down to the beer parlor, and her having to go into her section and him into his. They couldn't even sit together. Ridiculous-

ness, things like this."

Doesn't this kind of thing still go on in small towns?

"Not too much now, not even in Western Canada. There are still dry areas, with no drinking, but overall things are practically as 'advanced' as here. Still I think the country as a whole is a backwards country. Obviously these rules were responsible for that whole era and what it created. If there had been a healthier atmosphere in the beginning, it seems to me a lot of men wouldn't have gone out drinking. I know a lot of this has been brought over from England, the pub situation. Oh, you can still find them, not very many left, all those men



just sitting there drinking until they're drunk, then they probably go home and beat the shit out of their old ladies.

And their army experiences didn't help too much, either.

"Obviously. This is where the whole military situation, two world wars, have taken their toll. Once you've been taught to dress a certain way, cut your hair a certain way, think a certain way, you just don't shuck it off in a few years. It will take generations. I know a whole lot of guys in my own age group who are still entrenched in that whole philosophy. They're virtually still you people, but they grew up with that old jock strap, ballsy attitude. A man's a man by how much he can drink, and how big a belly he can grow from drinking, stupidity like this."

How did you handle the rape scene in the film? On stage it was done very discreetly with a virtual blackout.



McGrath with Carol Kane

“It’s brutal, it’s quite brutal. All you really see are faces – mostly. Billy (Doug McGrath) is an animal. But he’s an animal for a reason. There’s got to be some compassion, some sympathy. When he does it I’m sure it’s just going to leave everybody with an empty feeling in the pit of their guts. But when it’s over, I hope they understand why. The frustration that so many of these men went through in the war. Again, I was very tiny when the war was on, but I remember the dance hall on thirteenth street where this hell took place. I remember there used to be a big schoolyard right across the street. And I remember going across there one night and I saw men with girls pitted up against the school in the darkness fucking them. These poor guys, you know, off on a weekend, of course the one thing they wanted was a girl, so badly! I wanted to get into my dance hall sequence, much more of the frustration that went on. But again costs dictated. . . . The dance halls were just crammed with service men, there were hardly any girls, because people were smart, they kept their girls locked up, they knew what would happen to them when the bloody army got into town. The dance hall is a good sequence, it’s a lot of fun, it suggests the period and everything, but I couldn’t afford to hire all the guys I wanted to linger along the sides, and you know to really see the kind of thing that was in their faces.”

Billy doesn’t really come off that heavy in the play. As you say, he’s an animal, but he’s a likable animal.

“Well, he hasn’t changed too much in the movie. But there is the scene of his encounter with Dolly in the kitchen. You see how he has been teased by the other girl to the point of being driven to this. He tries in his own, awkward, fumbling way to kiss Jeannie, to make a conventional approach, but when she doesn’t react, he has to retreat to darkness. He turns out the lights and virtually attacks her, that’s all that’s left for him to do. He’s got to get laid, and it’s been on his mind since the moment they arrived. And when it’s all over I hope that people will feel compassion for him – the girl’s been raped, you feel for her too – but Christ, what this guy’s going through! Although there are many things sympathetic to the female, but I feel that the roles of both the sexes were cast in that period. The whole attitude, so stifling, so suffocating, obviously created so many of its own problems. I mean everybody knows that now, we’re supposedly ‘liberated’ now. (laughs) But I grew up in a small town, and I spent a lot of

frustrating evenings as a kid, because there was just no way to release it. Beer, or you went to the next town. There were towns where you could find some fun, but you started off on the wrong foot, that’s all, you’ve got to go and fuck a girl, you’ve got to find a screw – this whole attitude is wrong to begin with.”

When we visited the set there was this weird heaviness in the air. Everyone, Donald Pleasence, the producers, Richard and yourself, were just standing around with heads bowed down, not much was being said, but heavy energy vibes in the air.

“I don’t know what problems we might have encountered with the producers, I stayed away from that, I had so many problems of my own. There was a heaviness on the set, there’s no question. I remember seeing you there that day, then you disappeared. There was some sort of hectic thing, but it was a typical day. (laughs) I think that was around the fifth week of shooting, and the house was really starting to get to us. You saw the house, it was starting to get everybody. Every time we did a set-up it meant moving half the bloody furniture just to change an angle. Lifting rugs, changing lighting, shooting film is such a drag to begin with because of the pace that you’re usually moving at. I find it is so boring in between takes and between set-ups, and it was especially so in this house, because there was so much to do with set-up.” “After a while we really had to start minimizing, to plan more carefully. All of the great shots that I had in mind, most of them anyway, soon vanished, because it was just physically impossible. We’d have to tear a wall out or something. Or like the last shot, I picked the house, I had a whole archway designed for a particular shot. And when it came time to shoot it, it didn’t work. It would have meant tearing the whole bloody floor out, so the camera could drop down to the right level.” “Don’t ever work on location, for one thing, not even with an eight millimeter movie, I don’t think it’s worth it.”

If you had to do it over again, would you do it in a studio?

“This particular film, definitely, because of the one location. I felt it was going to be much more economical, because of the one location – or mainly one location – but it was exactly the opposite. It would have been much more sensible, going to a studio, because we could have moved.”

“Sound is one of our biggest problems. Right now we have a



big headache, the location sound is going to need a master sound technician. It can be repaired, I know that, but it should never have happened this way. It was a noisy neighborhood, and the whole structure of the house was like a small amplifier. Every time we'd do a master shot of course the guys couldn't get in close enough with their mikes, and the place just reverbed all over the place. Wherever we could we were laying blankets and rugs on the ceiling to muffle the sound."

Did you plan a visual style beforehand, or was it all dictated by the limitations of the set?

"No, we planned it – a lot certainly was dictated, many compromises were made – but we were still able to keep within the whole mood and style. Richard (Leiterman) and I spent a good week and a half before we started shooting discussing the lighting and the color of the set and I think we've got it dead on. I was really excited when the first set of rushes came through, because I thought it was going to cost us a lot more to get it. But we got it."

Most of the film was shot in that house, but there were other locations, weren't there?

"We had a dance hall, two Legion halls set up, a Chinese

restaurant, we shot some exteriors. We were very limited in that because of all the bloody TV antennas all over the place. In 1943 there was no television. We had a Kresges that we found for that period, out in Danforth somewhere, then we had a church. But the house plays a very important part in the picture, the whole atmosphere of the picture, because it is a stifling sort of story. And had we shot a hell of a lot more film away from there, we might start to lose some of this. I'm sure people are going to get a very claustrophobic feeling as the picture goes on, they're going to start to feel this confinement, hopefully it won't make them get up and leave."

"I cut quite a bit down from the play. I think I will be cutting down quite a bit in the editing of the film. Wherever I was unsure of myself in the rewriting of the script, I shot it anyway, I left it in, because it's always easy to cut it out at the end. A lot of them are long dialogue sequences, they're easy to cut. I'd rather have it and make sure."

How do you feel about having 'made it?' Four of your screenplays have been turned into feature films, the two that were released were very successful, you're the best known young Canadian scriptwriter around.

"It all happened very quickly. I've been very lucky. Film here
cont. on Page 57