



KAMOURASKA

geneviève
bujold

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What have you done most recently?

I did *Antigone* in New York. It was the Anouhil play, the *Vision of Antigone*. How anyone can dare to reinterpret the Greeks, I don't know! But at times, it's really clumsy, weak, the way he says things. In English it's stronger somehow, but still you feel that the idea of Man against State, Purity against Corruption, No against Yes, I mean . . . I really wanted to do that, and be her for a while. I'm a stage actress also, I used to do stage before I started in film. So for me to be suddenly offered a part that has a beginning, middle, and an end; that I can understand; that is chatty but not too chatty; it was wonderful! A real meaty part for an actress to really get going. It's like Olympic time coming, building up. It was the same, you know. I did *Journey* last summer, and *Kamouraska* for four months. I was really ready to do something in one sweep. So I did *Antigone*, and now I'm off for a little while.

Was it for stage?

It was done for television. I don't like TV as a media, so I don't know much about what goes on. But it's more and more rare to have plays on TV. Usually, it's serials, soap operas and

all that. Channel 13, the educational network, apparently has a reputation for putting on beautiful, classical plays four times a year. So it was nice. I did that with Fritz Weaver and Stacey Keach, and came back after fifteen days exhausted. I really let out a lot of steam.

Believe it or not, we rehearsed for nine days, which is really like nothing. It shouldn't be permitted. So little time. But we worked in the evenings on our own. You've got to get that emotional and intellectual sweep really going. We'd rehearse and then tape for five or six days. We worked around the clock. I have never worked in television like that, and I've been in TV for about six years. The last thing I did on television was with Paul, dramas — not plays. And I just don't remember it like that. This was madness! It was worse than a film crew. We'd start at nine in the morning and go until six the next morning. It was incredible. Jerry Freeman directed it.

Was it anything like filming "The Trojan Women" since both were based on Greek classics?

Cacoyannis didn't want us to rehearse together. Maybe it was right in the end, I don't know. I really wanted to rehearse with Katherine Hepburn. She was the one who had scenes with all the three other ladies. She played my mother, you know. And I wanted to know my mother before first day on set! But she's a very shy person. I mean, I understand her fear. She pushed it to the very last moment, where she would say, "Yes! I'm going to dive in and face a confrontation. Not only between the two characters but the whole thing!" We shot in sequence. Michael rehearsed each of us for two weeks in Madrid, and then he rehearsed us again, except for Katherine. But we had a beautiful rapport once we started to work. It was a very condensed, concentrated shooting for the other three actresses, because we shot a whole scene. We were really more prepared than for *Antigone*. I had rehearsed two solid weeks alone with Michael. We had talked about it. He really brought me to his level. He opened the door and said "Come in" about three hundred times. So I was ready to come in.

But as for **Antigone** on television, they seemed so worried about the set and stuff like that. Which for me has nothing to do with anything. We could be shooting **Antigone** now, I'm sure I'd shoot it. You could put a camera on the ceiling. It would be great! And let it happen . . . Something is bound to come across!

How did Antigone do, with all these problems?

Well, it's not perfect. Perfection bores me. But there are some great moments. I just wish I had more time, like two more weeks just with the actors. I said we rehearsed nine days, but with the coffee breaks and people coming in to see the makeup and the hair! I said, "Listen, there'll be no makeup and no hair!" But somehow, they just had to do that job so they would be hired again, you see? All those departments to come in . . . They are really nice people, but they have to do it.

So you really don't like makeup and costumes?

For me, costumes are . . . well, I don't know. If we could maybe be without clothes at all, it would somehow be the true thing. On film I never wear makeup. It's just trying to make you look like — not yourself, anyway. I somehow got friendly (that was the only way out) with the makeup man, and I'd say, "Listen, let's not do that." Just a little, so the person won't look pink or dead white. But that's all. For me, costume is just . . . Probably, it situates it for most people, but there's a way of moving, of looking and talking and behaving that's better.

But aren't you wearing historic costumes for "Kamouraska"?

Well, Barbeaux' costumes go in that direction. They are not costumes as such. They are part of the character. We talked about it. We read the book together. I don't remember a film where I got to be dressed like now — 1973. That all depends on the director, and the other actors. Because **Antigone** was shot with dresses like the one I'm wearing — which had a kind of line. So she wasn't in Courrèges, very stylized short dresses, but at the same time it was a dress I could wear. I like to feel comfortable. The form has to adapt, it can't be separate. It's got to marry really well to the content.

Have you ever had difficulty in getting good roles? Meaty parts?

I've been lucky. I have had great parts in my career. I've played Joan — a real crazy, stubborn, detestable, wonderful character. And **Antigone!** The last line in **Antigone** is, "I don't even know what I'm dying for!" She's dying, and Creon says, "I can't condemn her to live. She wants to die." At least in **Journey** I am alive at the end. That's a change. I always either get chopped up or burned, or given away to be destroyed by Agamemnon. There is always something that is very doomed about the women I have played.

Why do you think that is?

I don't know. If you look at me, I don't think I look like a doomed person. Maybe I do. I mean, I've got a nose in the air and I love to laugh! But somehow, there is always a glow of destiny, a fatal destiny surrounding the characters I play.

Have you found any difference between characters written by men and those written by women?

Wow! That is a wonderful question. Jesus! I'll have to think about that one . . .

What I mean is, most women are really two people. There's a part that is universal and could be man, woman, anything. And then there's a part that is all woman, which often doesn't come through in films written by men. They can only lift a few of the veils . . . You know, the difference between looking at and looking out from the inside. . .

Yeah. You just said it all. But don't forget that that word exists — *acting*. Actor. Actress. By becoming the part, I always feel that I remove that word. It's not acting. It's *being*. I remove that screen. But deep inside there is something that is never removed. Unless I were to write the thing. Unless I were to do it all, there will always be . . . Some roles will be more comfortable than others. After **Kamouraska**, there was no ghost left. With **Journey** — it took me weeks to get out of it . . . But there will always be a layer of veils that will never be

removed. You will never see the essence, the pure essence of me. You can get a glimpse. Some will leave the tap running long enough so that you can see the real quality of the water . . .

Do you ever have a desire to write something for yourself?

No. Not really. If I would think of directing I might direct a film on objects. Stuff like that. Colors and . . . A film on soldiers coming back from wars.

How much of an influence have you been on Paul Almond?

I never knew. We never discussed that.

But he wrote three films which you played the lead in, and all three were about women! . . .

Ah, but were they? Were they? If Paul could have played those characters . . . They happen to be women in the films, but I was his wife and I lived with him and I happen to be an actress. I have always wondered what it would have been like if it had been played by another actress. I am not the type to really question his motivations. When we moved to Tadoussac by the Saguenay to do **Journey** it was a mixture of being petrified not knowing what I was getting into, and how it would all turn out . . . And yet an immense hunger and curiosity to see what it would be. Not only as an actress, because the film is with Paul. You just don't go and shoot it . . . It's really not on that level, for me. Before the film, at night, and between takes is really more important than what actually goes on when the camera is turning. Am I making sense? It's so hard . . . I am not aware of the influence, if I do have any influence.

But he claims he wrote those characters with you in mind . . .

He claims that? He says that? Well, I wasn't aware of it then. I wonder if I didn't become somehow . . . It's so hard, you know. From out there I wouldn't have said they were me, but after having done them I say, "Yes. That's what I have become." Reality is so weak compared to dream. If you have a dream — compared to the other life the dream, or the double or reflection of reality is much stronger than the reality. If ever I am in reality and I need a stronger dream than my reality then . . . There is that reality of the dream, you know? I think he has influenced me. I was left with things, impregnated with things from him. Not him from me, I don't think. Maybe I'm wrong. I am the wrong person to ask that question of. I once played a girl called Isabel then Martha, then Saguenay. I don't know . . .

As I say, he would never talk about what he was writing. I would never know until there was a first script. I'm not very good at reading scripts. I know that I can recognize people, and I know if I want to enter the world of someone else. If that fascinates me or whatever. But to dissect and analyse — I am very bad at that. I'm not really interested. I seem to be a good instrument for Paul. Like a good violin, a Stradivarius . . . I hope it doesn't sound pejorative. Paul never tells me in films to "Do that." He goes even beyond that. He would never say, "Why don't you think of this" or "Why don't you try it that way?" Never.





Except once. In *Act of the Heart* I had a speech to do, where I talk about music, and he had a definite idea of what it should be. Well, I was incapable of doing it, and this part is not in the movie. I looked at it not too long ago, and it's beautiful. I think I could do it now. I couldn't then, though. She was to be sitting back, the sun coming up, they have spent the whole night at the hospital – the child being sick and all that. They are both sitting on a gallery, with the sun coming up in the sky; and he kept saying what he wanted and I said, "Just say the lines, play it for me." That was the only time that he really wanted me to give a certain quality and I couldn't do it.

So we shot it, and everything was against us. We were up at four for three days in a row waiting for that sun. You can't order the sun to come up! He knows that. It just won't come up! When it finally did, the sun was more mind-blowing than what I had to say or do. Not that it was bad, it was just that I did not want to do it. Finally, that's what it came down to. Whether I couldn't do it because I didn't want to or didn't want to because I couldn't – I don't know. It's not in the film. All this is to say that I am what I am, and whether that influenced his vision I really don't know. But I know that he has influenced me.

How did you feel about working with Paul after you were separated?

I love working with Paul. I love it. But it was like a wound without a bandage on. Really exposed, and the nature of the film in a way. You just don't go there to do a job. I can't. It didn't take anything away from the fact that we were doing a movie. We were really lucky to spend a beautiful summer like that and being paid to do it. Finding out things . . . Seeing things from another perspective and emerging from it all having learned a lot. Seeing a little bit more clearly about a lot of things . . .

Was Matthew in the film? Did we see him in "Journey"?

No, you did not. And you never will see him in a film. There is just so much . . . You can't show it all. But he was there. The Tadoussac summer really impressed Matthew forever. He will never forget that – he still talks about it. We would all go swimming between takes, we had a ball. It was good. He saw me working, so happy. Seeing Paul, and all those people. Everybody loved him. It was so wonderful for him.

Isn't it sometimes difficult to be an actress and a mother?

It's all working out fine. Maybe in this case, money helps a little bit. If you can afford somebody, and things like that. I often take him with me when I'm working. But even if . . . Somehow, I'd manage. There is no problem. It's the best school – right? The school of what's going on.

Did you see Journey?

I didn't stay. I really thought I would be able to. But as soon as he picked her out of the water, I walked out. I've seen

it, but always the unfinished versions. Two or three unfinished versions. What I felt is there. It's what you see. I can't really describe it. I think women will understand it. I do. I don't know about men.

Did you know from the beginning that it would be part of a trilogy?

God! No! It might end up being a hundred-trilogy. God knows! I have no idea what is going to happen.

So you would work with Paul again?

Sure. If he asks me. You get accustomed to things and you work things out. The wound heals eventually, the scar . . . It's not painful anymore.

What about "Kamouraska"? What is it about?

It's based on a very popular novel written by Anne Hébert. It takes place between 1840 and 1869. Obviously it goes deeper than that, but on the surface it's about the first evil bitch. Evil person. *Evil*. The more evil you are, the more good you can be, or were, or can become. If we were to talk about it, Anne Hébert probably wouldn't agree with all of what I have to say about the character. What I have to say is not really interesting. It's what I *did* with the character – how I became her, or were her, or tried to act her that we'd agree on. It's very hard to . . . it's so complex. How do you sum up a character like that? Because in the book it's all vignettes, you see. But just once in a while there will be a phrase that's like a dagger which reaches your heart. All that *poésie littéraire* (and I say that in the pure sense) had to be transposed into a *poésie* of images by way of the flesh we actors brought to the parts.

On the surface, it's a story of a girl. A woman. Most of it takes place between the age when she is 17 and 22. And all of it takes place from a flashback at the time she is 40. She was married. She comes from the wealthy bourgeoisie of Sorel. Brought up by her aunts and her mother, no brother or sister. She is really surrounded by women from the time that she is born. In the novel, Anne Hébert talks about the early infancy very briefly but beautifully. Flashes of her as an infant – her father, her mother. It's very brief but it says it all. She is a very passionate, intense little girl who wants so much. What she doesn't have – if she ever recognizes it in others – she will either want to get it, or if she can't she will destroy it. Because she can't stand not having it all. But that sounds so capricious. She is not capricious, it's not on the level of a caprice.

The first man she ever touches or sees is the Seigneur de Kamouraska, the English governor. And of course, she marries him, the most eligible 'partie', bachelor. He's rich and he's wild and he's handsome and all that. But she can't control him – He's too big for her. And that is where Anne Hébert and I disagree, I think. He is really crazy, also in the head. He is mad for that period. Right now, he would be like normal, but then he was just wild. She has the same wildness, the same torment, the same volcano in her, but it is well-controlled and just comes

