

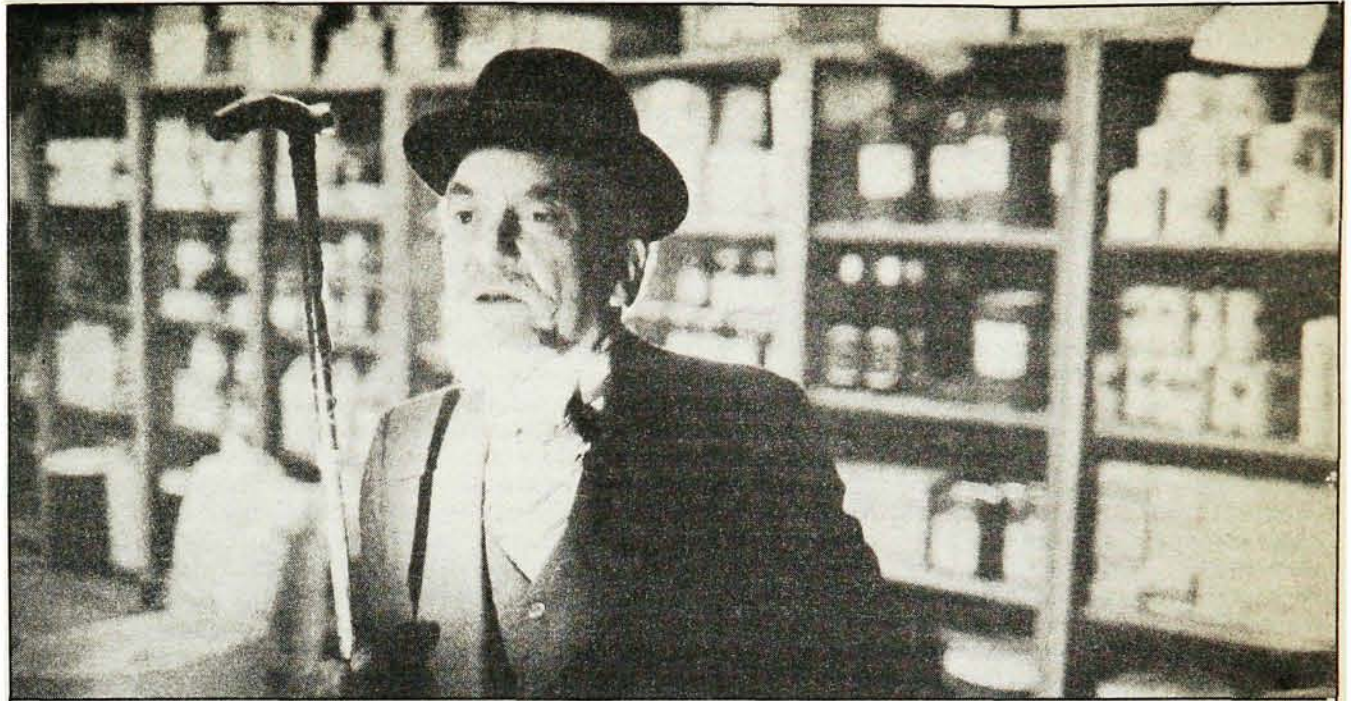
countless couch-potato Canadians he represents, a kind of journey to a sub-conscious homeland, which, like Oz's Emerald City, represents something as mysterious and alien as it is magical and magnetic. Simultaneously Steven is confronted both with his desire for and his difference from the media-created world of America he's so desperately wanted to be part of (a condition of cultural schizophrenia as characteristically Canadian as any other factor of our much-stalked identity). On the one hand, his reverential awe leaves him vulnerable to exploitation and a likely ravaging at the hands of the perverse Dr. Jolly (who exploits the Canadian's reverence for Yankee knowhow with no less cunning and ruthlessness than Donald Brittain's Hal C. Banks did), on the other, Steven finds a family in Kansas – albeit a crippled one, consisting of an invalid hillbilly woman and her oafish son – a family that was conspicuously absent from the otherwise TV-idyllic suburban environs of the first half of the film. And it is the strength provided by this image of American familial solidarity – retarded as it is – that fortifies Steven sufficiently to return to Winnipeg and crank out some middles.

Crime Wave may be the first Canadian movie that addresses the perennial issue and phenomenon of American media saturation in Canada that does not take absolute sides (it's neither nostalgic nor wistful, like *My American Cousin*, nor is it angry and cynical, like *Canada's Sweetheart: The Saga Of Hal C. Banks*), but instead acknowledges the actual complexity of the Canadian obsession (an obsession characterized by both attraction and revulsion) with our big brother's ceaseless northwards populace onslaught. If only for that, *Crime Wave* is a singular, and singularly Canadian (for what it's worth) achievement. That it has so much more to offer, including the promise of a future for Canadian cinema that develops out of, instead of withdrawing from or surrendering to, the inescapable fact of American cultural occupation of our Sonys and our subconscious, makes it something of a revelation to boot.

Geoff Pevere •

**At the time of writing, Paizs was hard at work shooting an alternate ending to Crime Wave, following the director's dissatisfied reaction with the split Toronto Festival reception. Paizs' concerns are commercial and thoroughly justified, as the journey-to-Kansas section of the movie is too dark and tonally at odds with the first part to make the movie a likely hit with distributors and mass-market audiences. My hope is that he keeps the original Crime Wave, in all its unbalanced, brilliant looniness, and releases them both. The more versions of this corker the better.*

CRIME WAVE d./sc./art.d./cam./p./ John Paizs ed. Paizs, Gerry Klyn, Jon Coultts p.c. Favorite Pictures Studios, 88 Adelaide St., Winnipeg, R3A 0W3; dist. Winnipeg Film Group, (204) 942-6795 **running time:** 80 mins., **l.p.** John Paizs, Eva Kovacs, Darrel Baran, Jeffery Owen Madden, Barbara MacDonald, Tea Andrea Tanner, Mark Yuill, Neil Laurie, Mitch Funk.



• *Le Matou's* evil Ratablavsky (Jean Carmet): ancient Quebec icon

Jean Beaudin's **Le Matou**

Florent Boissonneault is a young Québécois who works at a boring job and has a passion for restaurants. When a mysterious gentleman by the name of Ratablavsky offers him the chance to buy a local Montreal restaurant, La Binerie, famous for its Québécois cuisine, he invests his life's savings in it. To make ends meet he adopts as his partner a co-worker, Len Slipskin. Ratablavsky and Slipskin, however, manage to cheat him out of his restaurant and his money. But, with the help of his wife, Elise, he amasses enough capital from the sale of French-Canadian antiques to buy a new restaurant across the street from La Binerie. With the help of his friends (a French cook and a slum child) Florent defeats his ex-partner and the devilish Ratablavsky.

Le Matou, the novel by Yves Beauchemin was a huge success, not only in Quebec, but also in France where it won the prestigious Prix du livre d'été in 1983 and was selected for the French Book of the Month Club. It is an upbeat book.

But Beauchemin has been accused of anti-Semitism for making his devil figure, Ratablavsky, of Polish-Jewish origin. The author has publicly expressed regrets for his choice of antecedents for Ratablavsky, and all references to the character's religion have been expurgated from the English translation. And from the film as well.

Le Matou, the film, is fast-paced and entertaining, and, when the film premiered at the close of the World Film Festival, certainly the audience seemed to enjoy both the comedy, which is rather broad and caricatural, and the melodrama where the idealistic young couple wins against the devil himself. Yet a viewing of this Canada-France co-

production does not dispell the uncomfortable impression that either the Jew or, at least, the immigrant (still of Polish origin) has replaced the English capitalist as the villainous opponent to a new Québécois society.

The ally of the diabolical Ratablavsky (Jean Carmet) is the slippery Slipskin (Miguel Fernandez). It is hard to place him. He speaks mostly English and some very bad French; the film is very unspecific as to his origins. He seems to be some sort of Anglophone of immigrant origin. With a name like Len Slipskin it is hard for me to see this character as anything but Jewish. Included in his villainous traits is a liking for French-Canadian girls who are, in his words, "such good fucks." Slipskin seems reminiscent of Mordecai Richler's anti-heroes. Richler, however, places his heroes' sexism and opportunism in a psychological and social context. *Le Matou* does not. The anger of the new Québécois society seems to have been deflected from the English to the immigrant capitalist (Ratablavsky) and small entrepreneur (Slipskin).

Perhaps this is why the story supposedly takes place in the Plateau Mont-Royal (even though only a few of the location shots are actually filmed there). For it is here that the immigrant population is probably thickest in Montreal and it is here that immigrant entrepreneurs and restaurateurs abound. Do the Québécois feel that they are being pushed out of what was once a traditional French-Canadian working-class neighbourhood? It is true that gentrification has become a threat to this area of Montreal, but it is also a district where traditionally the waves of new immigrants have settled. The district at one time harboured the then-recent Jewish immigrants of Eastern Europe and Russia. In the film, the contemporary immigrant presence is used as a colourful backdrop. But, more insidiously, the immigrant comes to represent the forces of evil that the hero must conquer in order to establish the new Québécois society.

If one looks into the history of Québécois cinema one can see that other forces beside xenophobia must be at play in this social fable. Ratablavsky is reminiscent of an icon from the Québécois' cultural past, that is, Séraphin.

Séraphin was the main character in a popular novel, a radio program in the 1940s, a TV program in the 1950s, and two films, *Un homme et son péché* (1948) and *Séraphin* (1949). The diabolic Séraphin was a money-lender who through his greed for gold and his knowledge of the law controlled the village and was emblematic of the Québécois' fear of the money-principle. In her important study of Québécois cinema, *Un cinéma orphelin*, Christiane Tremblay-Daviault sees Séraphin's sin as that of political and economic power over a world that was supposed to be based on spiritual values and human relations, the world of rural French-Canadian society.

In *Un homme et son péché*, the force of money is greater than the force of nature. The hero, Alexis, is robbed by Séraphin of his land and his love. In the sequel, *Séraphin*, Alexis wins out over the money-lender and reestablishes himself with a new wife on virgin land. The continuation of Québécois society is assured. In *Le Matou*, Florent (Serge Dupire) also wins out over Ratablavsky in the end and ensures the continuation of Québécois society with the birth of his first child (he promises 23 more). But Florent does not base his prosperity on the promise of the land; on the contrary, he only goes back to his rural roots so that he can exploit his cultural past. His wife (Monique Spaziani) is an expert in French-Canadian antiques and they rebuild their capital by cheating farmers out of their seemingly valueless goods. Significantly enough, it is the discovery of a cupboard from "before the conquest" which makes their fortune. The Québécois hero has learned to use his roots and the power of money to his own advantage. A new society has been established, not only by defeating the immigrant, but also by defeating the fear of money and business-values of an urban society, a fear which shows up in many of the films of the '40s and '50s. Whether money and business values are really better than the spiritual and human ones of the past is a question open for debate.

In many ways, however, the central focus of the film is not the hero, Florent, but Émile (Guillaume Lemay-Thivierge), the slum child that the couple virtually adopts. On the film's publicity

poster Émile and his cat are the central motif. He is a boy of approximately six years of age, wearing a "Canadiens" hockey sweater and holding a beer in one hand. Literally abandoned by his mother, a lady of loose morals, he roams the back alleys with his cat and lives on Mae Wests, peanut butter and any booze he can find. A strange figure but also not without precedent in the history of Québécois cinema.

One of the most popular films of the 1950s in Quebec was *La Petite Aurore, l'enfant martyre* (1951). In this story of a mistreated child, the threat to the rural society comes from a process of self-destruction and self-alienation. According to Tremblay-Daviault, this sado-masochistic process issues out of the depths of a society which has been kept in a total state of dispossession on the moral, as well as the economic, political and social planes. Émile in *Le Matou* certainly seems to stand for this part of the Québécois society's past. Therefore, he must die by the end of the film as it is a past which the new Québécois society understandably wants buried. At his funeral Florent's wife goes into labour. But this baby will be born with a silver spoon in her mouth. However, the triumph of Florent's prosperity is still troubled by the shadow of Ratablavsky. After all, the devil cannot die.

Why does *Le Matou* evidently return to the motifs and symbols of Québécois films of the '40s and '50s? Perhaps the answer lies in its targeted audience, that is, that of television and popular commercial cinema. The film was funded, in part, by Telefilm Canada, Radio-Québec and Radio-Canada. Telefilm's Canada's funding of commercially viable films has led to a reliance on the Hollywood model. *Le Matou* is also to be made into a six-part TV mini-series. In such a case it makes sense to use icons familiar to a mass audience. For the same reason, the film uses well-known TV actors in character parts. We are in the realm of the Hollywood film and, therefore, in the realm of a popular genre. As in any genre film, a conflict of values pertinent to the society contemporary with the film is used as the basis for a dramatic conflict. In *Le Matou*, as in most Hollywood films, this conflict is resolved by displacement: Ratablavsky and Slipskin, the two outsiders, take the blame for the destructive aspects of an individualistic capitalism. And so, the hero is able to found a new Québécois society which has somehow integrated the values of capitalism with the human and spiritual values of the traditional peasant culture.

Mary Alemany-Galway •

LE MATOU d. Jean Beaudin, p. Justine Héroux sc. Lise Lemay-Rousseau from the novel by Yves Beauchemin p. man. Micheline Garant loc. man. Michel Chauvin 1st a.d. Mircille Goulet d.o.p. Claude Agostini cam. Michel Caron sd. Claude Hazanavicius art. d. François Lamontagne set. des. Réal Ouellette set props. Charles Bernier head make-up Louise Mignault head hair Camille Bélanger cost. des. François Laplante cost. Manon Brodcur gaffer John Berric key grip François Dupéré p.c. Cinévidéo Inc., Radio-Québec, SRC, Telefilm Canada, Société générale du cinéma, Intial Groupe, Antenne 2 TV France/Film A2 Cdn. dist. Vivafilm l.p. Serge Dupire, Monique Spaziani, Jean Carmet, Guillaume Lemay-Thivierge, Julien Guiomar, Madeleine Robinson, Miguel Fernandez, Julien Poulin, Alexandra Stewart, Yvan Canucl, Rita Lafontaine.

Sturla Gunnarsson & Robert Collison's
Final Offer

Final Offer: Bob White and the Canadian Auto Workers' Fight For Independence, the 90-minute NFB/CBC co-production broadcast Nov. 26 on prime-time, is one of the most compelling documentaries ever made in this country. The film takes us into the heart of the 1984 Canadian United Auto Workers (UAW) contract negotiation

with General Motors, an intricate process that becomes a riveting two-front battle conducted by Canadian UAW leader Bob White against senior-management of the American UAW and GM. In challenging the most powerful labour union in the U.S. (subsequent to which the Canadian UAW broke away from the American 'international'), as well as the world's largest industrial corporation, Bob White and his inner circle engage in a battle of nerves, bluff, strategy and stubbornness that takes on all the excitement of a political thriller.

The progress of events in this historic confrontation is gripping in itself, but co-directors Sturla Gunnarsson and Robert Collison heighten the tension by using techniques that seem to bring the

viewer right into the centre of the unfolding drama. In part, this is the result of the *cinéma-vérité* style, with its emphasis upon a moving camera, tight close-ups, and editing rhythms that emphasise cuts from one scene of tension almost directly into the next, with virtually no diminishment of the gathering energy. But perhaps even more fascinating, and subtly effective, is their use of a unique voice-over narration which plays the role of taking us right into the mind of Bob White himself. Time and again, the narrator tells us precisely what White is feeling or thinking, and why, during a phone conversation with his UAW adversary, the U.S. union president Owen Beiber; a confrontation with GM head of industrial relations Rod Andrew; a stressful moment at the bargaining table or with his own Canadian inner circle.

This style of voice-over is highly involving, and subtly becomes a means for the viewer's identifying with White as we experience the unfolding of events through his perspective. Coupled with a very clear detailing of exactly what is at issue moment by moment in the two-pronged negotiations process, this intimate voice-over fully includes us so that the impact of each stage in the tense situation hits home viscerally.

The film also has a highly dynamic structure, interweaving scenes of increasing stressfulness at the auto-assembly production line – the noise of the drills and the disturbingly metallic surroundings underline the difficult working conditions where a worker has to wait up to an hour just to be to go to the toilet – with the scenes of strategizing in White's office. Through this structure, we never lose sight of the Canadian workers for whom White is battling. As well, the scenes at the auto plant convey a certain vivid, *macho* dignity (no female workers are seen) which matches the negotiating style of the "tough, but steady" Bob White.

But it is in focusing centrally upon White himself that the film maintains its momentum and its political impact. The man's style, with all his energy, toughness, humour and political commitment, fully informs the film and makes it a story of personal triumph as well as a victory for Canadian labour. *Final Offer* is essentially about taking risks, not just in labour negotiations, but in every endeavour, including filmmaking. The skills of Sturla Gunnarsson, Robert Collison and their crew in terms of courage, talent and risk-taking, fully match those of their subject, the maverick labour leader, Bob White. This production is nothing less than a milestone in Canadian documentary history.

Joyce Nelson •

FINAL OFFER d. Sturla Gunnarsson sc./co-d. Robert Collison ed. Jeff Warren cam. Leonard Gilday loc.sd. Brian Avery, Ian Hendry mus. Jack Lenz narr. Henry Ramer asst.film ed. Susan Shipton asst.cam. Joel Guthroc add.cam. Rodney Charters add.loc.sd. Wolf Ruck re-rec. Terry Cooke p.asst. Renc Gluck unit admin. Julia Sreny, Sonya Munro p. Sturla Gunnarsson, Robert Collison senior p. John Kramer exec.p. John Spotton. The producers wish to thank: The membership and the leadership of the United Auto Workers Union in Canada, General Motors of Canada Ltd, The Royal York Hotel p.c. The National Film Board of Canada, (Ontario Production Studio), in association with The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.



• Canadian UAW head Bob White and advisors in *Final Offer*: draped in the Canadian flag