8-20-2012 12:00 AM

Fighting, Screaming, and Laughing for an Audience: Stars, Genres, and the Question of Constructing a Popular Anglophone Canadian Cinema in the Twenty First Century

Sean C. Fitzpatrick, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Dr. Christopher E. Gittings, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Film Studies

FIGHTING, SCREAMING, AND LAUGHING FOR AN AUDIENCE: STARS, GENRE, AND THE QUESTION OF CONSTRUCTING A POPULAR ANGLOPHONE CANADIAN CINEMA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

(Spine title: Fighting, Screaming, and Laughing for an Audience)

(Thesis format: Monograph OR Integrated-Article)

by

Sean Fitzpatrick

Graduate Program in Film Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Supervisor

_____
Dr. Christopher E. Gittings

Examiners

_____
Dr. Joseph Wlodarz

_____
Dr. Constanza Burucua

_____
Dr. Manina Jones

The thesis by

Sean Carl Brett Fitzpatrick

entitled:

Fighting, Screaming, and Laughing for an Audience: Stars, Genres, and the Question of Constructing a Popular Anglophone Canadian Cinema in the Twenty First Century

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

_____
Date

_____
Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

Abstract

This thesis addresses English-Canadian cinema's attempt to establish and maintain a popular cinema during the first decade of the twenty-first century, specifically analyzing the relationship between Canadian genre filmmaking traditions and the complexities of attracting popular Canadian audiences to homegrown films. This extended study examines a variety of films and people in contemporary English-language Canadian cinema, from Anglophone Canadian star Paul Gross and his films *Men with Brooms* (2002) and *Passchendaele,* to horror films *Splice* (Vincenzo Natali 2010) and *Pontypool* (Bruce McDonald 2009), and finally the action-comedy *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* (Érik Canuel 2006). Discussing the respective political economies, marketing, critical receptions, and production histories of a diverse selection of contemporary English-language Canadian films in case-study format, this thesis finds that, while troubled, it is undoubtedly possible to create a popular contemporary English-language Canadian cinema that exists, at least geographically and politically, apart from the dominant Hollywood filmmaking.

Keywords

Twenty-First Century, Contemporary, English-language Canadian Cinema, Anglophone Canadian Filmmaking, Anglophone Canadian Films, Popular, Entertainment, Genre, Genre Cinema, Genre Filmmaking, Paul Gross, *Men with Brooms*, *Passchendaele*, *Splice*, *Pontypool*, *Bon Cop Bad Cop*

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been completed without the patient help and guidance from my supervisor, Dr. Christopher Gittings, who assisted me in making coherent arguments out of my many incoherent ideas. Also, without all of the great educators and helpful administrators of the entire professorial and administrative staff in Western's department of film studies, neither this thesis nor this degree could have been completed. I would also like to thank Em, who encouraged, listened, commiserated, edited, and watched *The Simpsons* with me, all of which was indispensable. Andrew, for always wanting to talk about and play music when I didn't want to talk about or watch films. Cait, who lived above me, and gave up precious time between shifts to talk and eat frozen yogurt. And, last but not least, Mom and Dad for always encouraging and helping me when I felt most overwhelmed.

Table of Contents

List of Plates

Due to restrictive copyright laws, the images in this thesis have been removed. Below are the page numbers where the listed images would have appeared.

Introduction

Anglophone Canada's Homeless Popular Cinema

In early 2011, an English-language Canadian genre film called *Hobo with a Shotgun* was released into North-American theatres. The film, which was directed by the young Nova Scotian filmmaker Jason Eisener, had many attributes that seemed to herald its success in North American multiplexes. *Hobo with a Shotgun* was originally a "fake trailer" in Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's gritty double-bill homage to exploitation cinema, *Grindhouse* (2007). *Hobo*'s connection to these two superstar American auteurs not only contributed significantly to its salacious advertising campaign[1], but also added to the film's mostly-positive critical reception from both Canadian and American film reviewers. American critics immediately and consistently draw upon the relationship between *Hobo* and *Grindhouse*. Reviewers such as *Rolling Stone*'s Peter Travers argue that the "B-movie energy that pulses through this grindhouse wallow is not to be denied," while *Variety*'s Andrew Barker maintains that the film is "a grindhouse homage seemingly made for people who've never actually seen a vintage grindhouse movie." Canadian critics, contrastingly, concentrate upon *Hobo*'s Canadian qualities, in terms of both its representation of Canada's geographical and cultural specificity and the nation's filmmaking traditions. The *Toronto Star*'s Peter Howell asserts that the film "takes on genre filmmaking with a vengeance and a toque," while *The Globe and Mail*'s Liam Lacey describes it as "almost worthy of Guy Maddin, an affectionate re-creation of the kind of film that never actually existed, except in the fevered imagination of a devoted fan." *Hobo with a Shotgun* is a violent, low-budget genre film that stars the famous Dutch actor Rutger Hauer as the eponymous Hobo and follows the simple narrative of an urban vigilante film in which the protagonist attempts to improve the conditions of his urban surroundings by any destructive means necessary. *Hobo*'s attractions seemed to signal a

---

[1] The film's poster is deliberately shopworn and features the tagline, "delivering justice one shell at a time." Also, the theatrical and television trailers highlighted the film's most violent scenes.

rare moment of Canadian box office success prior to its release, but the film's genre conventions, positive critical reception, prominent advertising campaign, and thematic and stylistic connections with Tarantino and Rodriguez helped neither its domestic nor its international box office performance. *Hobo with a Shotgun* made little over $200 000 domestically and $700 000 in the United States[2] during its brief theatrical run, failing to recoup its $3 million budget[3].

Hobo with a Shotgun represents a high watermark in Anglophone Canadian attempts to establish a popular, mainstream cinema both within and without of the country's borders during the first decade of the 21st century. Whereas Québec's francophone cinema succeeded in establishing its own successful (sub)national film tradition in "the popular idiom" during the late-20th and early 21st centuries, with successful series films like the comedy-thriller *L'Assassin Jouait du Trombone* (Roger Cantin 1991), its sequel *La Vengeance de la Femme en Noir* (1996), and the hockey-comedy series *Les Boys* (1997-2005), contemporary (21st century) English-language cinema from both Québec and Anglophone Canada has not achieved the same cultural prominence (MacDougall 40). This regional disparity within Canada's film industry demands examination. Although the importance of Québec's popular francophone filmmaking industry and tradition cannot be understated, this study will investigate the problem of establishing, and contributing to, a popular cinema in Anglophone Canada.

The lack of popularity of Anglophone Canadian filmmaking raises important questions about why Canada's English-language film industry and tradition have failed to reach a popular domestic audience. When discussing the meager box office performances of English-language cinema in Canada, it is also important to distinguish between the nation's geographically and socially diverse regions and determine how they intersect and produce differing cinematic versions of English-speaking Canada. Moreover, this discussion demands an examination of the relationship between changing genre codes

---

[2] "2011 Box Office #1's by Weekend Gross."

[3] "Hobo with a Shotgun (2011)."

and conventions and the political economy and reception of Anglophone films, to illustrate the success, or lack thereof, of a film's contribution to the establishment of a Canadian popular cinema outside of Québec. The economic viability of alternative (i.e. non-theatrical) avenues for the viewing and distribution of English-language Canadian films will also be addressed during this investigation into the possibility of locating a popular English-language cinema in both Québec and Anglo-Canada. This investigation will be broken up into case studies that address individual Anglo-Canadian films, focusing upon their genres and other important factors that influence the circumstances of the popular success or failure of the specific film in question. *Hobo with a Shotgun* provides a good introduction to this extended study because it emerged at the end of a decade replete with commercially volatile Anglo-Canadian genre films. Eisener's film, therefore, is a very recent cinematic representative of Anglophone Canada's troubled establishment of a cinema that is popular both within Canada and elsewhere. Before an in-depth examination of this issue can begin, however, I will briefly contextualize Anglo-Canada's 21st century cinema within the country's broader filmmaking history and tradition.

Canada has frequently struggled to define itself against the backdrop of other, more prominent, Western film traditions[4]. On May 2, 1939, the Canadian government implemented the National Film Act and created the National Film Board (NFB), placing an Englishman named John Grierson in charge of the institution (Gittings 78). Under Greyson, the NFB's mandate was to produce films that "interpret Canada to Canadians and other nations," a doctrine that, in various manifestations, still exists today (*ibid.*). Alongside the NFB, the National Film Act also introduced the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (CGMPB), which was responsible for the creation of fiction

[4] This is a very brief, and by no means exhaustive, overview of Canadian film history. For more detailed descriptions Canada's cinematic history and traditions see Dorland's *So Close to the State/s* (1998), Gittings' *Canadian National Cinema* (2002), Marshall's *Quebec National Cinema* (2001), Morris' *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema* (1978), etc.

feature films. The CGMPB dissolved in 1941, however, leaving the National Film Board, and Grierson, solely in charge of the nation's film industry (79). Grierson actively discouraged fiction feature filmmaking, arguing that it was Hollywood's responsibility to produce such filmmaking. As a result, the NFB focused primarily on Documentary films and did not begin producing fiction feature films under its mandate until The Massey Commission in 1964. Introducing legislation that attempted to quell Hollywood's continued expansion into the Canadian film marketplace, the Massey Commission eventually led to the NFB's formation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, which was given a modest $10 million remit to oversee the creation of fiction films, in 1967 (87).

After the production of successful English- and French-language genre films like David Cronenberg's horror film *Shivers* (1975) and Claude Jutra's melodrama *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971), a strong genre cinema tradition began to develop in Canada during the late-20th century. Additionally, The transformation of the CFDC into its contemporary manifestation, Telefilm Canada, was accompanied by an increased emphasis on the importance of international co-productions in Canadian filmmaking (100). In 1998, Telefilm had set up 44 co-production treaties with 52 countries and, by 2009, the NFB's fiction-film organization had registered 52 co-production treaties with 52 countries, producing 57 international co-production projects that year. This increase in the number of co-production treaties and projects, while raising the Canadian film industry's annual output of motion pictures, has also frequently challenged the notion of what makes a Canadian film "Canadian." While this issue of communicating "Canadian-ness" in Canadian cinema is important, the interpretation of Canada to Canadians is implicit in my central questions surrounding the creation of a popular Anglo-Canadian genre cinema.

The question of "Canadian-ness" in Canada's filmmaking tradition reflects some of the issues that accompany the Canadian film industry's status as a national cinema. Andrew Higson, in his essay "The Concept of National Cinema," maintains that national cinemas participate in an "inward-looking process" wherein the economic, social, and cultural specificity of the nation-state moves to the representational foreground (54). While Higson's assertion about particular national cinemas having a desire to represent the

cultural, social, and political specificity of their nation is true in some cases, the connection between genre filmmaking and the construction of an English-Canadian popular cinema suggests that this "inward looking" process is somewhat contradictory. Revealing the tension between the recognition of "Canadian-ness" in English-language Canadian cinema and the desire to reach a popular audience, Jennifer Vanderburgh argues,

> In popular discourse, it is widely presumed that English-Canadian cultural specificity and the classical narrative form are diametrically opposed. The logic of this discursive paradigm results in a self-fulfilling prophecy that renders English-Canadian cinema, if divergent from classical Hollywood narration, marginal. As a result, the general characterization of culturally specific English-Canadian cinema considers it to be inherently uncommercial. Conversely, commercially successful Canadian films made with larger budgets in the classical Hollywood narrative style are not perceived to be Canadian (82).

Vanderburgh's delineation of this paradox, which suggests that Anglo-Canadian genre cinema must be either unpopular or un-Canadian, is debatable, but it nonetheless foregrounds the fact that English-language Canadian cinema, through its redefinition and reinvention of Hollywood genre cinema's codes and conventions, gives a self-reflexive dimension to Higson's assertion that national cinemas engage in an "inward looking" process. Canadian cinematic practices run counter to Stephen Croft's argument that national cinemas should be "defined against Hollywood" (49). Using genre cinema codes and conventions in their attempts to construct a popular Anglophone Canadian cinema, English-speaking Canadian filmmakers, by virtue of both their spoken and filmic languages, closely relate to Hollywood's cinematic practices. The "inward-looking" process of Canadian cinema can, therefore, be considered self-reflexive because of Canada's English-speaking filmmakers' reappropriation and reinvention of genre tropes and formulas. This practice of reappropriation aims to create an English-language popular cinema in Canada that both critiques and enters into dialogue with traditional Hollywood filmmaking. This is not to say, however, that English-speaking Canadian filmmakers are solely interested in critiquing Hollywood cinema. The uniquely Canadian self-

consciousness that permeates the traditionally-American codes and conventions present in English-speaking Canada's genre films not only critiques dominant cinematic modes of representation, but also various tenets of Canadian society, an issue to which I will return later in this introduction. The question of "Canadian-ness" and its connection with Higson's "inward looking" process of national cinema, however, while not being the primary focus of this study, will be addressed in my efforts to examine the construction of a popular contemporary Anglo-Canadian cinema.

The issue of self-reflexivity in English-Canadian genre cinema can be traced to the late-20th century, when genre cinema became a mainstay in both Francophone and Anglophone Canada's filmmaking tradition. As the Canadian film industry's concentration upon narrative cinema grew, many late-20th century Canadian filmmakers began to reinterpret, redefine, and reassign genre codes and conventions to fit a Canadian context. Jim Leach argues that, starting in the 1980s, directors such as Atom Egoyan, David Cronenberg, and Denys Arcand "turned to genre in an effort to reach larger audiences" (84). Consequently, connections between genre filmmaking and reaching toward broad audiences were created early in Canada's fiction filmmaking history, but this relationship between genre cinema and popular appeal in the Canadian context was, again, somewhat contradictory. Leach argues that, by assimilating the Hollywood-defined genre conventions of melodrama, comedy, and the horror film, with films like *Exotica* (1993), *Le Déclin de L'Empire Americain* (1986), and *Scanners* (1981), Egoyan, Arcand, and Cronenberg respectively sought to "provoke discomfort in audiences attuned to genre conventions, and [this process] require[d] a shift in perspective to enjoy the hybrid pleasures offered by tensions between genre and national context" (86). Furthermore, as the number of these Canadian productions that sought to discomfit viewers by redefining genre codes and conventions increased, the films were met with criticisms, like Sid Adilman's complaint in the *Toronto Star*, which argues that

> Canadian filmmakers, for all their boastful claims, do not know how to make popular movies. The ones they finance are about harsh subjects that put off potential audiences: *Kissed* about a necrophiliac; *Crash* about auto accident-

> triggered sex; and… *The Sweet Hereafter* about the impact that a fatal school bus accident has on a community (qtd. in Vanderburgh 82).

Adilman's argument regarding Canadian filmmakers' inability to make popular films demonstrates the impact that Canada's late-20th century genre auteurs had upon Canadian audiences. English-speaking Canadian film viewers and reviewers often considered Canada's auteur filmmakers to be producers of both art-house films and the nation's attempts at popular genre films. Although the films of Cronenberg, Arcand, and Egoyan undoubtedly use genre codes and conventions, especially those of horror and melodrama, their respective brands of cinema take a majority of their cues from European art filmmaking. Films such as *Crash* (Cronenberg 1997), *The Adjuster* (Egoyan 1991), and *The Decline of the American Empire* (Arcand 1988) have much more in common with the films of European auteurs than with more broad-minded Canadian films like *Meatballs* (Ivan Reitman 1979), *My Bloody Valentine* (George Mihalka 1981), and, more recently, *Foolproof* (William Phillips 2003). Despite the irony that the aforementioned auteurs have directed some of the most well-known films in Canada's film history, it is undeniably true that, as Jennifer Vanderburgh argues, their motion pictures seem to "deliberately tend toward the margins" (*ibid*.). This perceived obscurantism suggests that the films of Canadian auteurs in the late twentieth century somewhat unjustly came to be seen both the dominant contributing form of, and the repellant resistance to, the establishment of a popular Anglo-Canadian cinema.

While the aforementioned Canadian auteurs continue to work both inside and outside (in the cases of Egoyan and Cronenberg) Canada's film industry, the influence of Arcand, Egoyan, and Cronenberg's experiments in genre filmmaking pervades the work of younger contemporary genre filmmakers in Canada. English-speaking directors like Jacob Tierney (*The Trotsky* (2009)), Érik Canuel (*Bon Cop Bad Cop* (2006)), and Vincenzo Natali (*Cube* (1997) and *Splice* (2009)) continually produce films that maintain a tense relationship between the desire to break and reinvent the rules of genre cinema and the equally-strong desire to attract large Canadian audiences. This breaking-apart and reconstitution of genre codes and conventions provides the locus of overlap between filmmaking aesthetics and practices of the older (Cronenberg, Arcand, Egoyan) and

younger (Tierney, Canuel, Natali, et al.) generations of Canadian directors. The older and younger generations differ, however, in one important aspect. Whereas the older generation see themselves "as more European than American in… concerns and style," aligning themselves with the politics and aesthetics of international auteur cinema, the newer generation generally articulate particularly Canadian concerns and strive to reach the Canadian viewing public (Nayman, qtd. in Vanderburgh 87). Although both generations identify themselves as Canadian, the older generation's identification with European art cinema suggests a desire to be more than Canadian, to be international directors. It is for this reason that I will not thoroughly address the continued works of Egoyan, Cronenberg, and Arcand in my examination of popular English-language Canadian cinema. My near-total elision of these three prominent auteurs is mainly due to their *a priori* establishment as art-house auteurs who, because of their international pre-eminence, are Canadian outliers within the critical and popular discourse of film criticism. I am mainly discussing the younger generation of Anglo-Canadian genre filmmakers because, due to either a lack of international prominence as auteurs or a willingness to work within the confines of the Canadian film industry, these individuals primarily identify as contemporary Canadian directors, rather than internationally-recognized auteurs.

I will also be largely overlooking the 21st century work of Canada's up-and-coming women auteurs. Two of the most glaring omissions include the well-known actress and director Sarah Polley and the established feminist filmmaker Patricia Rozema. Although Polley's *Away from Her* (2006) garnered wide critical acclaim and received nominations from both the Genies and the Academy Award, the film is a prestige picture that does not adhere to the genre traditions that typically mark an English-Canadian film as an attempt to reach a popular audience. Additionally, Patricia Rozema, who directed the Jane Austen adaption *Mansfield Park* (2000) and *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl* (2008), has worked within the American filmmaking system for most of the 21st century, unfortunately excluding her work from the discussions of this essay. Additionally, Canadian comedienne Mary Walsh's 2006 film *Young Triffie* will be omitted from this study, although I will make a passing reference to her work on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* (1992) in this study's chapter on comedic cinema in Canada. It is an unfortunate fact that

few women filmmakers work within the English-speaking Canada's genre industry. This dearth of Canadian female genre directors certainly begs further investigation and requires more analysis than this examination of English-Canadian popular cinema could yield.

The noticeable absence of women filmmakers from this discussion of popular films in 21st century English-Canadian cinema mostly concerns the lack of women working within Canada's contemporary genre filmmaking industry and, therefore, pertains to the importance of genre cinema when establishing a popular cinematic culture. Illustrating the significance of genre codes and conventions to the establishment of a popular cinema, Rick Altman, in his book *Film/Genre*, asserts that "genres provide models for development of studio projects, simplify communication among studio personnel and ensure long-term economic benefits" (54). Although Altman is referring Hollywood's classical studio system in this quotation, the scholar's demonstration of how a film's generic attributes can act as shorthand for filmmakers also extends to the manner in which audiences receive and understand a motion picture. Genre conventions simplify any description of a film, no matter how complicated its plot may be. For instance, it would be excessively long-winded to describe the many twists and turns of Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (1941) in a press-release, but simply ascribing the terms "murder-mystery" and "romance" to the film simplifies and condenses the terms that will be used for its subsequent distribution, and marketing. Consequently, genre tropes, conventions, and terms can provide both filmmakers and their audiences with a means of understanding a film before its production begins or the projector illuminates a theater's screen. This system that articulates the establishment of expectations and anticipation has proven successful throughout Hollywood's, and even Quebec's, filmmaking history, but why does early-21st century English-Canadian genre cinema still lack the ability to attract a large theatrical audience?

The reasons for Anglo-Canada's lack of success in its endeavour to establish a popular audience for its films, either domestically or internationally, could reside in the way English-Canadian filmmakers formulate their genres. The genres on display in the films of Contemporary Anglo-Canadian directors seem to be in a constant state of revision and

experimentation. This means that they do not see genre as a simple process of what Stephen Neale calls "repetition in difference," which, essentially, is the surmounting of audience expectation by careful adherence to and expansion of traditional generic filmmaking formulas (48). Instead, contemporary English-Canadian directors no longer "treat genre as a complex *situation*, a concatenated series of events regularly repeated to a recognizable pattern," but break apart and disrupt genre codes and conventions to remove their audiences from the usual genre-film position of comfort and met expectations (Altman 84). Anglo-Canadian directors are resisting the formulaic path, which connects to Leach's assertion that "genre films… can tap into desires and anxieties normally unrecognized or repressed by most people. Popular genres can thus be interpreted as symptoms of collective dreams and nightmares" (83). Since English-speaking Canadian directors experiment with the forms and tropes of traditional genres, a Canadian horror film, such as *Splice*, *Pontypool* (Bruce McDonald 2009), and *Possible Worlds* (Robert Lepage 2000), would further disrupt genre film's potentially disturbing articulation of collective dreams and nightmares and also confront the viewer by overthrowing any expectation that accompanies the act of viewing of genre cinema. The English-language Canadian films that I am analyzing in this essay are examples of what Todd Berliner calls "Genre Benders and Genre Breakers" (25). According to Berliner, genre-breaking films "give audiences a feeling of mastery over a genre" by explicitly revealing the codes, conventions, tropes, and, by extension, the ideologies involved in the particular genre being used, while genre benders "do not expose their genre's ideological weaknesses… instead, genre benders exploit our traditional habitual responses to generic conventions in order to set us up for their unconventional outcomes" (27). Basically, genre breakers allow their audiences to participate in their playing-around with genre and generally exploit this breaking-apart of convention for comedic purposes, but genre benders use audience expectation against itself, disturbingly subverting expectations by subtly and insidiously undermining the typical generic representations of stories and characters. The Anglo-Canadian genre films that I will be discussing fall into either the former or the latter category. The very act of experimenting with genre, however, involves playing with audience expectation and interrupting spectatorial pleasure, which certainly affects the way in which popular audiences view English-Canadian genre cinema.

Genre clearly plays an important role in English-speaking Canada's striving toward establishing a viable popular cinema. The scholarly work of Altman, Neale, and Berliner will assist my theoretical analysis of twenty-first century Anglo-Canadian genre cinema and its filmmakers' varied experimentations with that filmmaking tradition's codes, conventions, tropes, and modes of representation. As Leach and Vanderburgh suggest, Canadian cinema establishes a firm relationship between genre filmmaking and the popular. Therefore, before I can further discuss the specific films that this study will examine in its case studies, it is necessary to outline the concepts of "the popular" that will inform my analysis of Anglo-Canadian popular cinema.

The "popular" in popular culture is a fraught concept due to its nebulous constructions in dominant cultural discourses. John Frow argues that popular culture "is located on, or indeed *is*, a contested ground… it must be understood in terms of struggle over how the world is to be understood – a struggle over the terms of our experience in the world" (73). Here, Frow demonstrates how popular culture does not represent a particular topic or specific branch of society, but instead represents an amalgam of individual efforts to articulate an understanding of their social, economic, and cultural environments. Furthering this cosmological aspect of the popular, Frow maintains that "the category of popular culture has a unitary form… only as long as it is derived from a singular entity, 'the people'; otherwise it breaks down into a bundle of very heterogeneous forms and practices" (82). Since "the people" never amasses into a singular entity, and varies from location to location, popular culture inevitably adopts the form of Frow's "bundles," manifesting itself in ever-differing forms and practices. Social, economic, and cultural environments change from place to place and, therefore, the popular varies widely because of the whims of individuals and their changing desires for ways to understand, and be understood by, their world. Stuart Hall furthers this idea of the popular as reflecting the outlooks of "the people" when he asserts that "popular culture always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people. It has connections with local hopes and local aspirations, local tragedies and local scenarios that are the everyday practices and the everyday experiences of ordinary folks" (25). Even though Hall is specifically addressing Black popular culture here, his argument surrounding the locality of the popular applies generally to theoretical formulations of

popular culture. In the previous quotation, Hall localizes the more general assertions that Frow makes, suggesting that the popular can essentially be located within very particular areas, whether those spaces are national, provincial, municipal, or neighbourhood-based. Consequently, popular culture is an eternally contested arena wherein the various sociocultural discourses of certain groups vie for ephemeral dominance over other, different discursive paradigms.

So, the question is: how do films articulate the popular? Popular cinema, like popular literature, music, visual art, etc., tends to contribute to a definition of popular culture. Hollywood cinema, perhaps unsurprisingly, has achieved a level of trans-cultural dominance through economic strategies such as product placement, saturation releasing, and pervasive advertisement, which certainly influences and articulates pop-cultural discourses. Hollywood's pop-cultural dominance unfortunately leads to an adverse, anti-Hollywood sentiment among Canadian, and other countries', filmmakers and critics. Leach argues that "the international success of Hollywood genre films has led to concerns about the impact of American culture and values on other countries where these films are seen, with the result that popular genres often seem like a threat to [non-American] national cinemas" (83). Moreover, Vanderburgh argues that when English-language Canadian blockbusters "happen – as they do on occasion – they are not considered to be Canadian. Arguably, the most significant implication of this paradox is that the discourse that informs the perception of English Canadian cinema reifies its marginalization as inevitable" (95). Vanderburgh's description of the systematic marginalization of successful and popular Canadian films is weakened by the recent relative success of markedly Canadian genre films such as the comedies *Trailer Park Boys: The Movie* (Mike Clattenburg 2006) and *Fubar* (Michael Dowse 2002), as well as Paul Gross' romantic sports comedy *Men with Brooms* and his wartime melodrama *Passchendaele* (2008). The scholar's suggestion that audiences of successful English-language Canadian films are wont to deny the Canadian-ness of those motion pictures, however, certainly illustrates the manner in which the work of Anglophone Canadian filmmakers is paradoxically excluded from mainstream audiences. On the one hand, Canadian cinema is rejected by many mainstream critics and audiences because it is too obscurantist or strange and, on the other, it is rejected by the same individuals for its

adherence to popular, "non-Canadian" forms of filmmaking. As a result of this catch-22, English-speaking filmmakers in Canada produce motion pictures that, rather than desiring to *define* popular culture, merely *desire entry* into it. Additionally, Anglophone Canada is disparately regional, with varying sections of the country possessing their own subnational identities and cosmologies, which makes the establishment of a single Anglophone audience inherently difficult. Therefore, between Hollywood's dominance of the nation's screens and the Canadian audience's differences in spectatorship, as well as its spectatorial resistance to both the nation's artistic and popular modes of filmmaking, Anglophone Canadian filmmakers make films that attempt to contribute to the establishment of a popular cinema culture in English-speaking Canada.

Genre and popular culture are inextricably connected in English-language Canadian cinema. The newer generation of English Canadian filmmakers continually produces cinematic works that desire entry into the popular culture of Canada and other countries. Their use and reinvention of generic codes and conventions function as means of using clearly-defined modes of representation to attract and establish a popular audience. This examination of various filmmakers' attempts to establish a popular Anglophone Canadian cinema highlights both the difficulty of creating and maintaining a widely-seen and high-grossing filmmaking tradition within Anglophone nations outside America and the way in which codes and conventions of the aforementioned dominant film industry are altered, distorted, and frequently indigenized to create a specifically Canadian viewing experience. The significance of genre within this indigenizing process cannot be underestimated. As a result, my investigation of the possibility of locating, establishing, and continuing a popular cinematic tradition in English-speaking Canada is divided into four case studies that are categorized according to genre. These genre-based case studies are further differentiated by the films-in-question and their thematic preoccupations, aesthetic techniques, articulations of "Canadian-ness," as well as their political economy, distribution, marketing, and reception. These case studies function as examples of English-Canadian attempts to create, or contribute to, an Anglo-Canadian popular cinema.

The first chapter and case study concerns the popular Canadian actor-writer-director Paul Gross and his status as both star and producer of Canadian popular culture. Gross is perhaps most famous for his performances in the English-language television shows "Due South" (1994-1996) and *Slings and Arrows* (2003-2006), but he has also donned the role of filmmaker/actor with two films: the comedy *Men with Brooms* (1998) and the war film/melodrama *Passchendaele* (2008). Gross, as one of the few recognizable Anglo-Canadian stars/auteurs that works almost exclusively within the Canadian film industry, represents a form of populism in Canada's cinema. This populism is bound up not only in Gross' friendly, often-smiley, and handsome persona, but it also pertains to the topics of his films, such as curling and Canada's involvement in WWI. The populist aspects of both Gross' star image and his films raise questions about what version of "Canada" the star represents. Furthermore, Gross-brand populism embodies Anglophone-Canadian cinema's desire for entry into, or even a rare wish to define, the nation's popular culture, which demands investigation. Gross also consistently engages with genre conventions that belong to comedy, war film, and the family melodrama, which often blend with his star persona to create unique forms of spectatorial expectations that accompany the releases of his films. This chapter discusses Gross' "all-Canadian" star image, raises questions about the star's generic preoccupations, *Passchendaele*'s preoccupation with "bringing the war home," the ways in which Gross' films were produced, distributed, advertised, and received, and the pertinence of these investigations to Gross' representation of an English-language "Canadian-ness," which signals his investment in speaking to Canadians.

In the next chapter, I address the horror genre and, more specifically, Bruce McDonald's *Pontypool* and Vincenzo Natali's *Splice*. Segueing from the discussion of *Passchendaele*, I will discuss the history of horror cinema in Canada and its popular beginnings with David Cronenberg and the Tax Shelter years. My case studies of the two aforementioned films will be also be introduced *via* an overview of the post-9/11 horror boom in Hollywood. In my discussion of Bruce McDonald's 2009 zombie film *Pontypool* will pertain to its alternative form of funding (independent investor), as well as its unique cinematic representation of a diseased bilingualism. Ultimately, McDonald's film is an unfortunate example of commercially unsuccessful English-language Canadian cinema

that was largely ignored by both critics and audiences. With *Splice*, I will explore the Cronenbergian and psychosexual elements of the film in relation to its revising of genre codes and conventions. The film is also an interesting example of a Canadian-French co-production whose Hollywood-funded advertising (in both television and press clippings) budget hinted at an aim for success with both Canadian and international audiences. Furthermore, the film features a Canadian star (Sarah Polley) and an American Academy Award winner (Adrian Brody). *Splice* is a commercially successful film that stands as a significant example of international cross-cultural flow that will be unique among the three chapters contained herein. Despite its lack of success at domestic and international box offices, *Pontypool*'s thematization of bilingualism, as well as its comedic elements, apply to the last chapter in this study, which discusses comedy cinema and Érik Canuel's 2006 film, *Bon Cop Bad Cop*.

The third and final chapter of this study will briefly address *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* and its status as a unique bilingual film within the longstanding traditions of comedic cinema in Anglophone Canada. From Tax Shelter-era successes like *Porky's* (Bob Clark 1982) and *Strange Brew* (Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas 1983) to Anglo-Canada's neo-Hoser films such as *Trailer Park Boys: The Movie* (Mike Clattenburg 2006) and *Fubar* (Michael Dowse 2002), English-language Canadian cinema has a rich history of popular comedic filmmaking. What individuates *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* from the rest of Canada's English-language comedies is its bilingual, pan-Canadian mode of address and, equally, its status as the most commercially successful Canadian film of all time. *Bon Cop Bad Cop* is explicitly steeped in bilingual tension, and this tension is undeniably present in its funding history, promotion, and uneven box office performances in Québec and English-speaking Canada. Furthermore, the film features two Canadian stars, Patrick Huard from Québec and Colm Feore from Ontario, which adds to the bilingual, bicultural appeal of the film. *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* also depends heavily upon the Hollywood-defined conventions of the buddy cop film for its plotline, but this American-style narrative is interestingly Canadianized through the film's blending of genre conventions and bilingual tensions. The film cleverly uses an apparently universal style of filmmaking (i.e., high-concept Hollywood blockbuster) to address very specific bicultural issues

within Canadian society. Beyond this reflexive use of genre codes and conventions, Canuel's film is also an effective piece of escapist entertainment that was highly successful at the domestic box office. *Bon Cop Bad Cop* will provide a significant and complex example of commercial success in English-speaking Canada's cinematic attempts to enter its domestic popular culture.

English-Canadian Cinema continuously struggles to establish a popular genre cinema inside the nation's borders. While it is important to consistently attempt to enter the theatrical market, these filmmakers are also assisted by the home-viewing methods of on-demand, DVD, and Blu-Ray. These new non-theatrical media help the films reach wide audiences. In my conclusion, I will briefly discuss some of these non-theatrical modes of viewing Canadian cinema. Subsequently, this study will conclude with a discussion of how the following case studies contribute to an understanding of English-speaking Canada's attempts to establish a popular cinema within its borders.

Chapter 1

A Seeker of the Elusive Grail of Popular Taste: Paul Gross

During a winter storm in the middle of the Northern Canadian Rocky Mountains, a far-off sniper fatally shoots a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer after he discovers a cadaver rotting under the snow. The sound of the gunshot echoes through the remote landscape. Several rapidly-edited tracking shots suddenly interrupt the tragically peaceful scene, revealing an unidentified dogsledder careening across the same mountain range. The setting then quickly changes to the inside of an RCMP station in which receptionists engage low-ranking policemen in a conversation about the reckless and eccentric actions of an unspecified police officer who made the odd decision to take a dogsled into the mountains rather than drive a broken-down snowmobile. Immediately, the doors of the police station burst open, interrupting the employees' gossipy conversation. A hooded man wearing a heavy coat walks into the room, carrying an unconscious person over his right shoulder. The intruder roughly deposits the motionless individual on a bed in a nearby jail cell. After making a humorously flippant remark about the new prisoner's habit of overfishing, the hooded man reveals both his handsome face and his identity as a young RCMP officer named Benton Fraser. One of the onlookers quickly directs Fraser into his commander's office, where the young policeman quickly defends his reckless decision to venture out into a snowstorm to stop the apparently-insignificant actions of an overzealous fisherman. Fraser explains that the fisherman was dynamiting lakes and managed to obtain over four tons of fish, which the policemen confiscated and donated to a remote Inuit village. After Fraser's tale of noble police-work and charity mollifies his commanding officer, a receptionist comes into the office and reveals that Fraser's father was killed in the mountains. Consequently, the scene's previous comic levity returns to the tragic gravity of the initial sequence's murder. This convoluted chain of events constitutes the opening events for the pilot of *Due South* (Paul Haggis 1994), the popular Canadian television series that tells the story of an upstanding young RCMP officer who must relocate from Northern Canada to inner-city Chicago to solve the mystery of his father's murder. The series' success also introduced numerous Canadians and Americans to a charming leading-man named Paul

Gross (Benton Fraser), whose ability to represent both a humorously naïve fish-out-of-water and an emotionally wounded orphan searching for his father's murderer made him Canada's most endearing and enduring star.

Despite some supporting credits in earlier films and television serials, it was Gross' portrayal of an RCMP officer (or "Mountie") in *Due South* that made him a star. Since Gross works almost exclusively within Canada's borders, it is appropriate that his star persona began with the role of a Mountie, which is arguably one of the most recognizable, stereotypical, and oversimplified pieces Canadiana in North American public discourse (Cobban). Viewed within the context of Gross' twenty-first century work, Benton Fraser's genial and morally-upstanding characteristics seem to anticipate Gross' later manifestation as a genial, and apparently bankable, Canadian star who continually works within Canada's borders. Gross' *Due South* role also prefigures the star as a national icon whose cinematic work attempts to both represent and define the nationality of English-speaking Canada.

Gross' status as an Anglophone-Canadian star pertains to Richard Dyer's theories on social and cultural notions of film celebrities. Addressing the importance of film stars in popular cultural discourse, Dyer argues that interests in cinema's celebrities connect to a human desire to define and investigate what it means to be a person in contemporary society:

> Being interested in stars is being interested in how we are human now. We're fascinated by stars because they enact ways of making sense of the experience of being a person in a particular kind of social production (capitalism), with its particular organization of life into public and private spheres. We love them because they represent how we think that experience is or how it would be lovely to feel that it is. Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling, and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed. Much of the ideological investment of the star phenomenon is in the stars seen as individuals, their qualities seen as natural (15-16).

By asserting that the general public's interest in stars represents a curiosity about "how we are human now," Dyer gestures toward the solutions that stars pose to problems of identity in contemporary society. According to Dyer, stars make us feel an increased comfort and contentment toward the way society functions. As thoroughfares of satisfaction with the status quo, stars are visually-manifested instruction manuals for consumption of products, romantic and emotional behaviour, social propriety, the construction or deconstruction of prejudices, and how an individual can balance the tense relationship between personal and private affairs. In short, stars help to culturally define what it means to be a good citizen in a capitalist society. Dyer expands upon this conception of stars as exemplifications of good citizenry when he argues that members of filmgoing audiences are "also part of the making of the [star's] image. Audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions, that work for them" (4). Here, Dyer suggests that audiences choose the manner in which they understand the star's persona as a social and cultural symbol. Inevitably, due to the apparently solid, but often porous membrane between their public and private personalities, stars are conflicted, contested, and contradictory texts. The consequence of the contradictory sociocultural roles of celebrities is a form of audience participation wherein consumers define how they want to view a star, selecting from various competing discourses to create a unified personality.

Gross' status as a national icon, therefore, arises from a mixture of industrial and spectatorial participation in the creation of his star image. The influence of Gross' bodily and facial features upon his star persona also cannot be underestimated. The classic handsomeness of Gross' blue eyes, square chin, broad shoulders, and tall frame, along with his ever-grinning face in promotional, tabloid, and newspaper photos and genial public personality, recall the carefree good looks of Hollywood stars like Cary Grant, Gene Kelly, and George Clooney and certainly have contributed to his industrial construction as a likable, and friendly Canadian movie and television star with a reserved,

yet undeniably present, sex appeal[5]. This attractiveness also speaks to the relationship between the construction of Gross' star image in Canada and the manner in which celebrities are made manifest in Hollywood. Cinema's leading men and women attract potential investors to a film because they can presumably draw an audience, thereby increasing the motion picture's chances of generating revenue.

In the same way that film genres use a type of industrial and spectatorial shorthand to attract niche audiences to the theatre, stars are foregrounded by the film industry to which they belong because of the possibility that they can successfully convince their fan-bases to buy tickets. Dyer argues that stars are profitable and indispensable parts of the way films are sold, and further demonstrates how "the star's presence in a film is a promise of a certain kind of thing that you would see if you went to see the film… they are also a property on the strength of whose name money can be raised for a film" (5). Gross can be considered the English-language Canadian film and television industry's most bankable star. In a 2001 interview with *The Toronto Star*'s Martin Knelman, Robert Lantos, the president of Toronto's Serendipity Point films and former CEO of Alliance Canada, asks himself what Canadian cinema offers to broad domestic audiences. The media mogul answers his own question by avowing that "we've got Paul Gross" (D3). Lantos' asseveration of Paul Gross' stardom implicitly suggests that Anglophone Canada does not have many film celebrities who work within the country's borders. Consequently, Gross can be considered one of the few English-speaking Canadian film stars, if not the only star, whose career began, established itself, and continues to be successful in Canada.

---

[5] When Gross was promoting his writing and directorial efforts *Men with Brooms* (2002) and *Passchendaele* (2008), he was interviewed by many journalists, including *Take 1*'s Cynthia Amsden and *Now Magazine*'s Susan Cole. In the respective write-ups of their interviews with Gross, both of the aforementioned women comment uncritically on the star's handsome features, revealing the undeniable connection between his good looks and his star image.

After the conclusion of *Due South* in 1999, Gross expanded his résumé by diversifying the artistic side of his career and personality. Beginning with his 2002 comedy-sports film *Men with Brooms*, Gross started writing and directing films. The star also frequently performed live theatre and recorded two country-music albums with his friend Dave Keeley, *Two Houses* (1997) and *Love and Carnage* (2001). Even Gross' post-2000 television work, particularly his role as Geoffrey Tennant on *Slings and Arrows* (Coyne, Martin, and McKinney 2003), indicates the star's continued maturation as an actor. The increased diversification of Gross' artistic accomplishments led to his reputation as a star that "has just done it all" ("Sudbury"). Gross' newfound status as a Canadian renaissance man produced the star's corresponding prominence as one of Anglophone Canada's foremost cultural producers. As a possible acknowledgement of this newly developed artistry and his status as prominent cultural producer, a large majority of the star's musical and cinematic works are preoccupied with English-speaking Canada as a nation and English-speaking Canadians as a people. Although the overt Canadiana of Gross' music would produce an interesting essay on its own, this chapter will focus upon the manner in which the star cinematically participates in, and attempts to define, a populist Anglophone "Canada" in both his romantic comedy and sports film *Men with Brooms* and his later domestic melodrama and war film *Passchendaele* (2008). Gross wrote, directed, produced, and starred in these two vastly different films, revealing the star's personal desire to fulfill the Griersonian mandate to "interpret Canada to Canadians."

The genres of *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele* intersect with Gross' celebrity persona and, by extension, the star's process of highlighting and reflecting both the films' and his own performed Canadian-ness. The pervasiveness of Gross' own image in his formulaic filmmaking is evident in his writing, directing, producing, and acting in both of the aforementioned films. The prevalence of Gross in his own films demonstrates how the filmmaker and his works occupy the complex cinematic space in which star and genre intersect. Stars who write, direct, and act in their own films frequently intertwine the codes of their own stardom and the recognizable genre traditions they employ. Woody Allen, for instance, became famous by predominantly making comedies like *Annie Hall* (1977), *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), and *Midnight in Paris* (2011), into which the director inserts a performative version of his own personality that mixes the traditions of

comedy with his own star image and persona. In a manner that emphasizes populism over art, filmmakers and actors like Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks also engage in a similar blending of an audience's genre- and star-based expectations. Bearing an especial similarity with Spielberg's form of populist and entertainment-centered auteurism, Gross' films attempt to represent English-language Canadian-ness through their star, stories, and representational practices. Although Gross is much more aligned with Spielberg and Hanks than Allen, the Canadian star's filmmaking is comparable to all of the aforementioned American filmmakers because his star image and persona permeate and inform the genre codes and conventions that he uses in both *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele*. The version of Canadian-ness that Gross represents and performs is inextricably bound to the filmmaking practices and traditions that he employs. For instance, both Gross' characters in *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele*, the prodigal curling legend Chris Cutter and the injured and heartsick Michael Dunne respectively, represent the all-Canadian aspects of Gross' persona while, simultaneously, serving as microcosmic examples of the primary genre tropes and nationalistic themes in place in both movies. Additionally, since Gross' films are among the highest-grossing English-language Canadian films of all time, despite their inability to recoup the cost of their respective budgets at either domestic or international box offices, the star can be understood as a popular Anglophone-Canadian celebrity that desires, through both his persona and his cinematic work, to establish a successful pop-cinema in English-speaking Canada.

This relationship between Gross' star persona and his Anglophone Canadian genre films was even suggested prior to the release of *Men with Brooms*. At the beginning of the film's promotional campaign, which unprecedentedly saturated Canadian mass media outlets (a topic which will be discussed later in this chapter), Lantos maintained that "God was in a good mood the day Paul Gross was born" (qtd. in Amsden 24). Regardless of Gross' films' respective inability to recoup their costs, the intended humour and offhandedness of Lantos' complimentary attitude toward Gross elides the previous quotation's conception of the star's image in popular culture. Gross is repeatedly cast as a natural, all-Canadian star, suggesting that the apparently organic manner in which he acts is not a construction. The simple cinematic and pop-cultural manifestation of how Gross

"really" is ultimately covers up the industrial and personal investment that both the star and the English-language Canadian film industry have in his ability to represent Canada; but what version of Canada does Gross represent? Dyer argues that "the whole media construction of stars encourages us to think in terms of 'really,'" gesturing toward the general concentration upon the star's "real" personality in popular discourses (2). Inevitably, this question surrounding the star's "real" character is answered by the spectator's construction, based on specific narratives about the persona that are circulating in the mainstream media, of the star's real personality. The star's persona is simplified, however, when the aforementioned question is answered by the mainstream media through the simple and overpowering description of the star as a national emblem.

Gross represents the Canadian film industry's aim toward popularity, consequently positioning him as both a participant and a producer in the process of construction surrounding what it means to be popular in contemporary Canadian society and culture. He consistently strives to create populist and popular Canadian films that break away from, and stand in opposition to, the abstruse, somewhat-perverse, and, most importantly, putatively pretentious art-house fare upon which Canada has staked its international cinematic reputation[6]. Like the role that made him famous, the star's work as an actor-writer-director in both *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele* problematically foregrounds populist and popular notions of Canada and the nation's people. Gross' conception of English-speaking Canada is limiting, stereotypical, and exclusionary, emphasizing specious examples of Canadian citizens who are patriotic, humble, strong, eloquent, sporting, heterosexual, and white. In conjunction with the limited version of Canada that Gross foregrounds in his films, his cinematic emphasis upon genre formula and thematic simplicity also presupposes a prescription for aspirationally popular Anglophone-

---

[6] In Brian D. Johnson's "Romancing the Stone," Cynthia Amsden's "Canadian Comedy, Eh?," Paul Quarrington's "Of Ice and Men," Gombo Phinjo's "Curling for Dollars," Martin Knelman's "Pushing Brooms in Very Unusual Ways," as well as multiple reviews by prominent film critics, including *The Globe and Mail*'s Liam Lacey, *The Toronto Star*'s Pete Howell, and the *National Post*'s Katrina Onstad, there is an emphasis upon the populist and anti-arthouse nature of *Men with Brooms*, especially, but in *Passchendaele* as well. Gross appears particularly interested in debunking the popular notion of Canadian filmmakers as purveyors of "weird sex," to quote Amsden.

Canadian filmmaking. Consequently, Paul Gross represents a star who desires entry into the popular culture through his process of defining a seemingly ideal, but undeniably problematic, version of English-speaking Canada, its people, and its cinema, which is evident in both *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele*.

1.1 Playing for Canada: *Men with Brooms*

Paul Gross' directorial debut, *Men with Brooms*, mixes the genres of romantic comedy and the sports film to form a utopian narrative about the redemptive powers of the quintessentially Canadian sport of Curling. The film takes place in the fictional Ontarian town of Long Bay. The near-Rockwellian industrial town's citizens apparently pass the time by driving, drinking copious amounts of coffee and beer, having friendly conversations with one another, and, with a passion that overshadows all of the aforementioned activities, Curling. *Men with Brooms* mainly tells the underdog story of four curlers, protagonist Chris Cutter (Paul Gross) and his friends Neil Bucyk (James Allodi), James Lennox (Peter Outerbridge), and Eddie Strombeck (Jed Rees), who reunite after the death and funeral of their one-time curling coach Donald Foley (James B. Douglas). In a videotaped will, Foley demands that the team reassemble to win the Golden Broom tournament (an unbelievably popular and fictitious homage to the major curling event, the Men's Brier Cup). As a codicil, the late coach also requests to be put in the handle of a curling stone and placed "on the button" (the centre of the "house," the target upon which points are scored in curling) when the men win the aforementioned tournament.

The high-concept sports-based plotline of *Men with Brooms* is accompanied by a large amount of supporting narratives. The primary plotline addresses Cutter's complex relationship with his father (Leslie Nielsen)[7] and, additionally, the protagonist's romantic

[7] Nielsen's presence in *Men with Brooms* is worth noting here. As a Canadian star that found fame in Hollywood comedies such as *Airplane!* (Jim Abrahams and David Zucker 1980) and *The Naked Gun* (David Zucker 1988), Nielsen lends some genre legitimacy to Gross' film. Since Nielsen became famous in a star system that often overrides Canada's own star system, Nielsen could be seen as an indicator that *Men with Brooms* is taking a Hollywood genre (romantic comedy-sports film) and placing it within a Canadian context with a Hollywood star.

entanglement with Amy Foley (Molly Parker), who is his late coach's daughter and ex-fiancée's sister. The secondary storylines involve Bucyk's negative relationship with his unfaithful and overbearing wife (Kari Matchett), Strombeck's attempts to overcome his sperm's low motility level and impregnate his loving wife (Jane Spidell), Lennox's problems with his gambling debts, and a surprisingly tepid lesbian romance between a police officer (Victoria Snow) and a diner owner (Deirdre Kirby). The film's ever-divergent narrative developments suggest that Gross had two competing desires: the first was to narrate a simple story of a how the once-estranged members of a curling team reunite and, through sport, become the unlikely heroes of their small town; the second was to sketch the star's ideal Canadian village, in which all the characters represent a small part of the national sociocultural *milieu*. Additionally, at the time of the film's release, Jim Sherry, a distribution executive at Alliance Atlantis, argued that "while there's a huge curling audience that we think is going to love the movie… we're leery of limiting the potential. So we've targeted it in three ways – to a curling audience, as a romantic comedy, and as a buddy comedy" (qtd. in Johnson 53). The film's overt mixture of genre codes and conventions contributed to its overabundance of supporting characters and subplots. Before this discussion of *Men with Brooms*' thematic development and political economy can continue, however, it is necessary to briefly pause to examine the three genres that Gross' film uses to construct its plot.

The sports film, which is arguably *Men with Brooms'* primary genre focus, is important because of its frequent representation of a team of underdogs, who usually signify the nation, fighting against adversity to achieve personal and athletic victory over both other people and their private problems. Addressing the sports film's tense relationship with realism, David Rowe argues that sport films reflect a "contrast between the realist foundation of sports broadcasting and documentary on which mythological edifices can be built, and that of the fictive approach that begins with the suspension of disbelief and ends with the attempted construction of a higher 'truth' of sport and society" (146). Here, Rowe presupposes that sports films occupy a contradictory space wherein the "real" footage of a particular game (usually evoked through the presence of a play-by-play commentator) exists alongside the narrative structure of a team learning an essential truth about themselves and their environments through their sport. This learning process is

exactly what happens to the four members of Long Bay's curling team. *Men with Brooms*' conclusion champions both the personal and public victories of the film's characters, whether those triumphs are Strombeck's impregnation of his wife despite his diagnosed sterility or the team's achieving victory during the Golden Broom tournament. Cutter's narrative also concludes with the consummation of his romance with Amy, which connects to the film's second generic attribute: the romantic comedy.

Men with Brooms uses romantic comedy tropes to supply the audience with interesting storylines that add depth to the film's curlers. Discussing the romantic comedy's resurgence in the 1980s, Steve Neale argues that the rekindling of the romance genre not only hearkens back to the generic codes and conventions of Classical Hollywood, but also the "ideology of 'old-fashioned' heterosexual romance and hence of the rituals, signs and wishes that… revivify the institution of marriage and traditional gender relations" (63). *Men with Brooms* undeniably marks a return to the heteronormative romance and an attempt to establish a supposedly proper mode of sexual conduct for English-speaking Canadians. Despite the marginal and fleeting appearance of an implied lesbian romance in Gross' film, it undoubtedly emphasizes both its sports film and romantic comedy conventions, which foregrounds its reactionary response to then-recent English-language Canadian films like *Crash* (David Cronenberg 1996), *Kissed* (Lynne Stopkewich 1996), and *The Sweet Hereafter* (Atom Egoyan 1997). Brian D. Johnson argues that, with *Men with Brooms*, "Gross has tried to break the art-house mold of our [Anglophone Canadian] cinema – with its pathological themes of incest, necrophilia, and car-crash sex – to create a populist romp for mainstream Canada" (51). Johnson rightly places *Men with Brooms*' polite romantic comedy conventions in opposition to the aforementioned art-house films and their boundary pushing experimentations in modes of cinematic representation for human sexuality. The romantic side of *Men with Brooms* adds a prescriptive lesson about sexual propriety to its primarily sports-based plotline. Gross also adds a near-tangential buddy film aspect to the film's romantic comedy and sports-film attributes.

The buddy film, which evolved out of the comedic Laurel and Hardy films from the 1930s and developed further with homosocial road movies during the 1960s, features an increased emphasis on the male bonding and camaraderie that exists to resist imposing

female figures (Laderman 42). Throughout *Men with Brooms*, women represent the domestic sphere of Long Bay. Despite the presence of female police officers, occupational therapists, and even astronauts in the film, the town's women mainly exist as alternately supportive and negative presences in their male counterparts' home-lives. Additionally, the buddy film's representation of homosociality within male-male friendships generically demands that the men defuse the sexual tension in their relationship. In *Men with Brooms*, there are scenes of male bonding in which men hold hands, swim naked, and tenderly hug each other, but the relationships between the male characters are always guarded and protected under the purely heterosexual paradigm of the male athlete's platonic relationship with his teammates.

Based on the three aforementioned genres, it is easy to see how *Men with Brooms* prescribes certain modes of behaviour through the genre codes and conventions it uses to define the relationships between its characters. Although these competing generic desires produced a somewhat unfocused film, they are not opposed to each other. *Men with Brooms* establishes connections between the three genre traditions at its core by foregrounding Gross' character as the focal point for each of the genre codes and conventions. Cutter alternately becomes the paramour, best friend, and underdog sports star that occupies the focal points of each of the film's generic strains. By concentrating all of the narratives upon Gross, *Men with Brooms* makes the star an emblem for both Canadian masculine behavior and English-language Canada's popular cinema. As a result, this high-concept coalition of genre codes and star persona creates a film that attempts to representationally define a popular Canadian audience. Gross' insistent attempt to make a populist and popular English-language Canadian film is also exemplified in the rhetoric surrounding the supposed Canadian-ness of *Men with Brooms*.

In his article about the production of *Men with Brooms*, Brian D Johnson channels Gross' rhetoric surrounding the film's Canadian-ness when he argues that "there are two Canadas – the urban core and the hinterland of small-town, suburban and rural communities. Curling and Canadian cinema belong to different worlds" (53). Johnson's emphasis upon curling and its rural-Canadian roots was an important part of the thematic rationale of Gross' film during its production. In 2002, according to the Canadian Curling

Association, 350 000 Canadians were curling every week in over 1000 registered curling rinks throughout the country (McAndrew D3). Despite Gross' desire to omit their presence, there certainly were, and are, curling arenas in urban areas like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal. Additionally, in contrast to *Men with Brooms*' emphasis upon the small-town as a signifier for Canada as a nation, the film's website quotes Gross' argument that "there is something really fantastic about Canadian iconography. When you think about it, it's sort of bizarre – a beaver, a maple leaf. There is an oddball quality to it that is both melancholy and laughable all at the same time, and I think there is something really wonderful in that" ("Men with Brooms"). Gross wants to address the entirety of Canada as a nation, but seems to construct Canadian-ness *via* both geographic and cinematic binaries between categories like rural-urban, white-Other, heteronormative-queer, and arthouse-popular. Gross' rhetorical bifurcation of Canada ironically undercuts *Men with Brooms*' ostensible goal of addressing a utopic Canada that is united by a national sport. Gross' divisions essentially divide the country along both cinematic and geographic lines, thereby aligning urban Canada with art-house pretention and a lack of interest in curling and rural Canada with populism and an overwhelming interest in the aforementioned sport.

Robert Lantos enhances the contradictory nature of *Men with Brooms* when he maintained that the film was "not a masterpiece. But it's a feel-good romantic comedy, a movie about *us* [sic], in the broad sense. And it's not about curling; it's about a group of people" (Johnson 53). While Gross desires to address rural Canada as the subjects of the film and its sport, Lantos emphasizes the pan-Canadian-ness of the film. Also, whereas Gross seems content with the film's blatant representations of stereotypical Canadian images, including beavers, coffee, and curling, as well as its uncritical use of genre tropes, Lantos reveals some of his negative feelings surrounding its shortcomings. Despite this apparent contradiction between Lantos' and Gross' rationales for the film's production, the film's funding seems to be generated by Lantos' description of its pan-Anglophone-Canadian theme which is also inextricably bound to the country's national pastime of curling.

Men with Brooms was made for $7.5 million by Serendipity Point Films, which supplied the money with the assistance of $2.5 million from Telefilm's Canadian Feature Film Fund for the production (Melnyk 258). This unprecedented amount of production funding was given to Gross because of his and Lantos' shared goal of challenging themselves "to make a movie that was popular with Canadians" (Quarrington). Unsurprisingly, the film was also funded on the strength of Gross' post-*Due South* star persona. Illustrating the power of Gross' starring presence in the film's production, Martin Knelman argues that "it helps that in the person of Paul Gross, who played the popular Mountie in *Due South,* it has one of the few genuine stars ever to emerge from a domestic TV series" (D3). Lantos expands upon Knelman's argument, asserting that "we feel that Paul Gross on the big screen can draw an audience as successfully as he did on TV with Due South" (qtd. in Knelman D3). The importance of the popularity of Gross' role in *Due South* to the production of *Men with Brooms* cannot be underestimated. The film began production in 2001, only two years after the end of *Due South*, which suggests that Gross' acquisition of unprecedented funding undeniably relates to the strength of his popularity on Television. The popularity of Gross' televised star image undoubtedly informed the film's production and its use of his persona, but the film also attempts to address, through both its use of Gross' all-Canadian star persona and stereotypical images of Canada's national iconography, what it means to be Canadian. As mentioned above, this definitional aspect of the film's national identity is also connected to its treatment of curling. Fittingly, Gross' film was scheduled to be released just after the high-profile curling events in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and emerged amidst the hype surrounding the both the women's Tournament of Hearts and men's Brier Cup in early 2002 (*ibid*.). *Men with Brooms*' strategic release date is merely one example of the clever and expensive production and marketing campaign that accompanied the release of the film.

The marketing budget of *Men with Brooms* was particularly remarkable. With an estimated $1.75-2 million available for its publicity campaign ($1.2 million of which was supplied to distributor Alliance Atlantis by Telefilm), the film had the highest advertisement budget of any Canadian film in history (Melnyk 258; Johnson 52). As mentioned before, the film features a tripartite mixture of genres. In conjunction with

Gross' star image, this mixture of generic codes and conventions informed the film's publicity campaign, and is especially evident in the film's poster, which was omnipresent in the months before its theatrical release. *Men with Brooms*' poster features its most prominent stars, Paul Gross, Leslie Nielsen, and Molly Parker, looking directly into the camera. The poster's tagline maintains that "there's more than one way to sweep a woman off her feet," which ingeniously connotes all three of Jim Sherry's aforementioned genre tropes. The curling aspect of the film is denoted in both the stars' collective brandishing of brooms and the tagline's emphasis on "sweep" as a play on words. The romantic-comedic aspect of the tagline is obvious enough, due to the phrase's figurative suggestions about courtship and falling in love. The buddy comedy aspect of the tagline emerges when the sentence is read as a piece of advice given from one male friend to another. The tagline also functions alongside the respectively seductive, confident, and goofy pictures of Molly Parker, Paul Gross, and Leslie Nielsen to pictorially indicate the hybrid nature of the film. *Men with Brooms*' poster, which was prominently featured in many newspapers, magazines, and billboards throughout Canada, provides a pithy example of how the film used its substantial financial endowment for advertising.

The promotional budget of Gross' film also allowed for a number of cross-promotions and advertisement campaigns, including the pressing of an original soundtrack by the Canadian rock band The Tragically Hip, television advertisements on 18 Alliance Atlantis-affiliated channels (the trailers featured on television have the same tripartite genre coding as the posters), cover stories in various magazines, full-page advertisements in prominent national and local newspapers, a promotional tie-in with the Canadian Curling association, pre-selling the film's broadcast rights to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and a successful novelization by Canadian novelist Diane Baker, which, along with other *Men with Brooms* paraphernalia, Indigo Books president Heather Reisman agreed to prominently feature in her store (Gombo J3; Richler; Johnson 53). Additionally, *Men with Brooms*' website, which exists as an offshoot of Serendipity Point's webpage, includes many text-based pop-up windows that contain polite interviews wherein Gross talks about his cast and production, the cast discusses their roles, Gross, and their nationality, the film's positive critical reception, and general rules

and history for the sport of curling (Serendipity). Both the money and work that went into *Men with Brooms*' promotional campaign demonstrates how the film aimed to construct a popular Canadian film in both production and marketing. Although Gross' English-speaking Canadian star image undoubtedly informed the film's marketing campaign, its promotion expanded beyond its star and attempted to enter popular discourse. The industrial investment in *Men with Brooms*' desire for entry into Canada's popular-cultural consciousness also caused its 150-screen opening weekend, the acquisition of a chartered plane that flew the cast to various coast-to-coast premieres, and the appearance of both Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Heritage Minister Sheila Copps at the film's Ottawa premiere (Hébert; Johnson 52). The film's marketing, promotion, and distribution figured it as a populist and popular Canadian film; it is popular because it adheres to Frow's assertion that popular culture is founded on contested cultural ground and it is populist due to its employment of idealized signifiers of the nation that pertain to a white, Anglophone, male, and non-queer version of Canada. This two-sided sociocultural status informed *Men with Brooms*' critical reception.

Upon its opening weekend, *Men with Brooms* received mixed reviews from Canadian critics. Liam Lacey of *The Globe and Mail* argues that Gross' film's genre mixing produces "jarring shifts in tone [that] are a problem throughout the movie, as forays into dramatic seriousness are often disrupted with jokes that aren't always worth the trouble." Oppositionally, *The Toronto Star*'s Peter Howell offers a more positive assessment of the film when he maintains that Paul Gross "knows his Canadiana… never has there been a movie more unabashedly Canadian, not afraid to risk American scorn or disinterest" (D1-D2). While Lacey mainly concentrates on *Men with Brooms*' clumsy mixture of genres, Howell decidedly focuses upon the film's Canadian content and its representation of Canadian-ness. Howell's review characterizes most of Canada's critical reception of the film, which generally features articles that demonstrate how Gross' motion picture is not particularly good, but its Canadian pride is particularly charming[8]. Praise of the film's

[8] Each of Jason Anderson's, Matthew Hays', and Ingrid Randoja's respective reviews for *Eye Weekly*, the *Montréal Mirror*, and *Now Magazine*, despite their varying degrees of positivity and negativity about the

positive qualities as a quintessentially Canadian film largely glosses over the problematic nature of the film's implementation of genre codes and conventions, as well as its manipulation of pieces of Canadiana, to prescribe normative modes of behaviour for English-speaking Canadian citizens. Furthermore, this specious form of criticism leaves Gross' universalizing, overdetermined image of Canada unquestioned. Only Katrina Onstad, the film reviewer for the *National Post*, addresses *Men with Brooms* from the ambivalent perspective of a Canadian viewer who feels obligated to enjoy and positively assess the cinema of Canada. Onstad argues that "too often, when it comes to reviewing Canadian movies, good intentions lower the bar. Critics become a flock of two-faced cheerleaders, and the public suffers in this Emperor's New Clothes scenario… [but] when you don't like a Canadian film, you feel like a bunny-kicking bully. You feel mean" (PM 1). Here, Onstad reveals the ambivalent position of being a Canadian film critic and audience member during a screening of a Canadian film. Despite the strong desire to react positively to a Canadian film, sometimes it is important to constructively critique so that the country's cinematic work will improve. Both the positive and negative Canadian reviews suggest that cinematically pandering to Canadian audiences ultimately pleases them, but the speciousness of that form of representation produces ignorance toward the more insidious implications of such a patriotic film.

The American reception of *Men with Brooms*, perhaps unsurprisingly, focuses more objectively upon the Canadian-ness of the film's subject matter, but the critics are much more critical toward the film's unfocused treatment of genre. In an anonymous review in *Empire Magazine*, a critic argues that "for most it will prove too innocent and guileless to hate, but lacking in great laughs to truly enjoy." Although the critic ignores the film's clear position as a piece of pro-Canadian populism, the only complaint the review directs toward the film regards its lack of laughs. Like the *Empire* critic, *Variety*'s Robert Koehler discerns that the "Canuck pic slavishly traces the pattern of Brit comedies about

---

overall quality of *Men with Brooms*, comment approvingly upon the film's send-ups and references of Canadian cultural iconography.

cute, lovable working class underdogs reaching for one last, unlikely grasp at the price… [with] leaden predictability, along with a corny sense of humour." Koehler is much more critical than *Empire*'s critic, but the former addresses the same problematic themes of genre specificity and the predictability of both the film's plot and its sense of humour. Koehler's review also predicts that the chances of the film's box-office success in the United States are very low. This low probability of American box-office success is because the U.S. is "where curling is, at best, a curiosity and, at worst, mildly mocked." Through understatement, the reviewer's assessment of the film's overt use of Canadiana suggests that American audiences do not feel strongly for the national tropes of the northern country. Consequently, Koehler's review ultimately prefigures the mediocre box office performance of *Men with Brooms* in America, presupposing that the problem of cross-cultural communication inevitably exists between even the most geographically- and linguistically-linked nations. The uncaring spectatorial reaction that Koehler predicts is evident in Steven Rosen's review for the *Denver Post*. Rosen argues that the film's actors "thoroughly enjoyed themselves and believed in their small-budget film." Rosen's avowal of *Men with Brooms*' comparatively small budget ignores the significance of the film to the Canadian film industry. The reviewer's suggestion that *Men with Brooms* was a free-spirited low-budget film unknowingly acknowledges the manner in which all cinematic works from Canadian, no matter how big their budget, will be considered insignificant films by Hollywood standards.

Although the reception of *Men with Brooms* from both Canada and the United States addresses the more salient issues of Gross' film structure and the modes of genre filmmaking that he employs, some of the Canadian critics address the actor-writer-director's star persona. Onstad argues that "for me, the ubiquitous image of a smirking Paul Gross… always set off a wave of anxiety followed by a prayer: sweet-Jesus-please-let-it-be-good" (PM1). The *National Post* reviewer reacts somewhat negatively to Gross, whose charming good looks represent a wholesome form of English-language Canadian-ness that seems unearned in the context of his film and television work. Peter Howell, despite the overall positivity of his review, argues that Gross' multitasking on the film is "three toques too many… [his] onscreen presence smoulders where it should sizzle" (D2). Here, Howell suggests that Gross' shortcomings as a director and screenwriter

overshadow his likable acting performance, thereby demonstrating how the star's jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none filmmaking style is not conducive to a single-handed establishment of an English-language Canadian popular cinema. The critic gestures toward Gross' status as an English-speaking Canadian star and criticizes its prominence, arguing that a cinematic multitasker in Canada needs to do more than merely reference and represent Canadiana. Additionally, Liam Lacey questions Gross's motives for making *Men with Brooms*, arguing that the film, like its star, "wants very badly to be liked." Lacey's debunking of Gross' apparent likability in Canadian popular culture reveals the way in which each of the aforementioned reviewers are discomfited by Gross. The star represents a utopian brand of Canadian representation that exists in opposition to Canada's well-established art-house cinema. The populism of Gross' image indicates both the star's desire to be loved by the Canadian public and his apparent need to stand apart from the prominent artistic corpus of Canadian moviemaking.

Ultimately, *Men with Brooms* earned slightly over $4 million at the domestic box office, failing to recoup its $9 million production and marketing budget ("Boxoffice"). Gross' film is ultimately an example of the aim toward popularity in Canadian filmmaking in the twenty-first century. Despite the strong support that the film received for its production, marketing, and distribution, its lack of comedic prowess inevitably hurt its box-office performance. Gross' star persona, despite the criticism that he received in reviews, became even more prominent because of his newfound skills as a director and screenwriter. The film is also considered to be a commercial success in the Canadian film industry, which allowed Gross to further augment his growing star image (Howell "Sweeping"). Although it was in-development for six years, Gross' next project as an actor-writer-director was *Passchendaele*, a WWI-film that tells the personal story of Gross' maternal grandfather (played by Gross), whose heroism and participation in Canada's nation-building provided the inspiration for the star's own cinematic nation-building project.

1.2 Fighting for Canada: *Passchendaele*

In 2008, Gross philosophically and cinematically moved away from the lighthearted subject matter of *Men with Brooms* when he released *Passchendaele*, the credits of which feature him as the producer, writer, director, and lead actor. Gross' second directorial effort addresses the efforts of the Canadian Armed Forces in World War One, specifically focusing upon the Canadian victory at the Third Battle of Ypres (or "The Battle of Passchendaele") in 1917, an event that is widely considered to be a nation-defining moment in Canada's history (Knight PM6). The Battle of Passchendaele is also a pyrrhic victory in Canada's military history, since the conflict concluded with 16 000 Canadian casualties (including 5000 fatalities). Gross' film condenses the widespread tragedy of this WWI battle to tell a story with two agendas. The first of these preoccupations is the film's nationalistic narrative, which represents Canada as a young nation that, due to its army's battlefield expertise and willingness to make sacrifices, rose to international prominence between 1914 and 1918. The second agenda of the film is to mediate its naïve and overgeneralized version of Canada through a concentration upon the largely-discrete hometown and wartime experiences of Sergeant Michael Dunne, a noble soldier who fights for redemption while living in, and fighting for, Canada. Before the story of *Passchendaele* can be further analyzed, however, it is important to briefly discuss the film's production history.

Passchendaele was made with a $20 million budget, receiving $3.5 million from Telefilm, $5.5 million from the Alberta government (then led by Ralph Klein), and $12 million from private investors (Adams; Walton R1). The film was also given a $2 million marketing budget from Alliance, its distribution company (Adams). The film's production budget greatly exceeded the average English-language Canadian film budget of $7- to $8 million, which, along with its wartime subject matter and unprecedented amount of funding for advertising, positions *Passchendaele* as a film that not only aims at popularity, but also attempts to address the concerns of a national audience (Walton R1). Gross explicitly maintains that the film specifically aims to address Canadian audiences when, during an interview with Bruce Kirkland in which he is asked about his refusal to request funding from American production companies, the star argues that "I certainly

wasn't making it for the American audience" (Kirkland 48). Gross' disavowal of his film's hypothetical American audience is further concretized by the film's 202-screen domestic release (Adams). *Passchendaele*'s production and marketing costs, emphasized representation of Canadian-ness, and wide release demonstrate both Gross and his investors' desire for the film to become an Anglophone-Canadian blockbuster in the high-concept style of Hollywood directors like Steven Spielberg. This desire for box office success is problematized, however, by the film's representation of a tragic time in Canada's history. Despite that *Passchendaele* frequently and overtly insists in its own historical veracity, the film's high-concept, nationalistic story and unprecedented level of public and private financial support implicitly reveal its goals as a piece of entertainment. Consequently, the film's claims to factual representations of the past are undercut by its problematic reliance upon genre codes and conventions, which are exclusively intended to entertain.

Passchendaele begins by depicting Dunne's violent wartime actions in early 1917, before his entry into the film's eponymous battle. During these pre-Passchendaele experiences, Dunne watches a German machine gun kill nearly all of the young men in his platoon. In retaliation, the protagonist throws a grenade into his German aggressor's pillbox and stabs a young and unarmed enemy soldier in the forehead with his bayonet. This act of brutality informs most of the film's subsequent home-front plotline, in which Dunne returns to Calgary, his hometown, to recover from a shrapnel-related leg injury and "neurasthenia" (an early-twentieth century term for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). During Dunne's convalescence, he falls in love with Sarah Mann (Caroline Dhavernas), the nurse who is responsible for healing his wounds. Although *Passchendaele* primarily concentrates upon Dunne's high-concept story of redemption and romance, Gross broadens the film's scope as a nation-building narrative by adding the stories of numerous supporting plotlines and characters. While *Passchendaele* and *Men with Brooms* are starkly different films, the two feature the same preoccupation with small towns and their people. Like *Men with Brooms*, *Passchendaele* prominently features many geographically proximal characters that, despite their obvious personality differences, conflicting ideals, and occasionally hostile actions toward one another, constitute a tightly-knit community. These characters and situations include Sarah

Mann's addiction to morphine, her asthmatic brother David's (Joe Dinicol) enlistment in the army to gain the approval of his fiancée's father, the prejudice and victimization that the Manns experience when their neighbours discover that their father participated in Germany's war effort, a Boer War veteran-*cum*-recruitment officer's (Jim Mezon) unabashed jingoism and bigotry, the injured or sickly men who cannot join the army, and many other townspeople and soldiers that populate *Passchendaele*'s representation of Canada's past. The small-town version of Calgary that Gross constructs in *Passchendaele* is, like Long Bay, a microcosmic canvas upon which the writer-director paints his conception of Anglophone-Canada during the mid-1910s. Furthermore, the wide array of people and problems in the home-front segments of the film presupposes an attempt to foreground the factuality of Gross' historical representations. *Passchendaele*'s ardent investment in its own historical reality is undercut, however, by the writer-director's promotion of the film as a somber and tragic story that derives from a family member's trauma.

Passchendaele's main character and storyline are based upon the traumatic experiences of Gross' actual maternal Grandfather, Michael Dunne. The personal nature of the film's narrative was stressed by Gross in numerous newspaper and magazine articles prior to the film's release. In a promotional interview with the *Toronto Sun*'s Bruce Kirkland, Gross describes an idyllic fishing trip that he embarked upon with his grandfather when he was fifteen years old ("Following" 48). On that trip, Dunne told the future star about various horrific experiences during the First World War (*ibid.*). In a subsequent interview with *Via Destinations*, Canadian railway company Via Rail's in-car magazine, Gross enhanced the biographical aspects of *Passchendaele*'s storyline by explicitly emphasizing the influence that Dunne's story had upon the film, telling interviewer Mathieu Chantelois that "it was as if a door opened and I suddenly understood that men's actions sometimes have terrible consequences. Ever since I've been haunted by those memories of war" (30). Gross' avowal of the haunting effect that Dunne's memories had on him gestures toward the star's problematic internalization of his grandfather's trauma. Essentially, Gross subsumes his grandfather's memories into his own performance, personality, and star image in *Passchendaele*, allowing him to "give voice to so many voiceless heroes" (31). Gross' role as actor, writer, producer, and director of *Passchendaele* positions him

as the sole narratorial voice for the film, its characters, and its historical subject matter. Consequently, Gross operates as both a stand-in and narrator for civilians, soldiers, and Canada at this important moment in the nation's history[9]. The star's doubled status as an actor and teller of history extends to his depiction of Canada's home-front during WWI, which displays his interest "in the tiny effects of it [WWI], the destruction of love of the deformity of neighbourly relations or the rift in a community" (Kirkland "Following" 48). Gross' explicit interest in the emotional devastation that war inflicts upon Canada's cities, towns, and neighbourhoods transforms his film's representation of Calgary in 1917 into the depiction of a metaphorical Canadian any-place; a historical construction that is intended to resemble any and every community in the nation at that particular point in time. The star consistently reiterates that *Passchendaele*'s scenes of home-front hardship and warfare are based upon factual research, confirming his investment in the film's claim to historical and biographical reality[10]. Despite this insistence upon the film's factuality, Gross eventually admits that "only the bayonet thrust came directly from Dunne" (*ibid*.). By admitting that only one specific scene in *Passchendaele* came directly from his grandfather's recollections, Gross extensionally and tacitly indicates the contrivances inherent to the film's storyline. These contrivances and constructions are revealed by *Passchendaele*'s dependence upon the codes and conventions of two major genres throughout the development of its dipartite narrative of Canada's war at home and abroad: the war film and the melodrama.

---

[9] In an interview with Bruce Kirkland, Gross suggests that, during the filming of *Passchendaele*, he experienced what the soldiers that he depicts in the film experienced during the 3rd Battle of Ypres. When Kirkland maintains that the filming of *Passchendaele* became Gross' battlefield, the director affirms his interviewer's statement by referring to the "mess… mud, [and] cold" on the set during the shooting of the film ("Odyssey"). Here, Gross clearly emphasizes the importance of establishing a connection between himself and the (non)fictional soldiers that are represents in *Passchendaele*. Furthermore, this pretense of "being there" allows Gross to legitimize his role as stand-in and narrator for the experiences of Canadian soldiers during WWI.

[10] In multiple interviews with the *Toronto Sun*'s Bruce Kirkland, as well as articles written by *The Globe and Mail*'s Dawn Walton, *Via Destination*'s Mathieu Chantelois, and an anonymous article published by the *National Post*, the historical veracity of Gross' representation is repeatedly highlighted and championed.

Since *Passchendaele*'s ostensible focus is the third Battle of Ypres, the film most immediately belongs to the war movie genre. Steve Neale provides a broad definition of the aforementioned genre when he maintains that it is comprised of "films about waging war in the twentieth century; scenes of combat are a requisite ingredient and these scenes are dramatically central" (117). Here, Neale succinctly explains the general topics and typical sequences of war films, but he largely elides their thematic preoccupations, which lead to the construction of subgenres that occupy different spaces within the broader categorical field of the war movie. The war film genre can be divided into various thematically- or historically-defined subgenres, such as the antiwar film, the pro-war film, the combat film, WWI films, WWII films, Vietnam War films, Civil War Films, and, most recently Iraq War films[11]. The subgenres are united, however, by a collective insistence upon realism (Rubin 1). War films depend upon realism for their communicative impact, but this dependence produces a problematic tension. A realist film's investment in the re-construction and communication of a particular truth would presumably come into conflict with a genre film's construction of a fictional story that is primarily intended to entertain audiences. This tension between realism and genre codes and conventions makes war films complex and ambivalent texts that are often based on contested representational territory. War films are pieces of historical fiction and, as such, are inextricably bound to discursive narratives of national history and identity. Consequently, a war film will often be accompanied by significant questions surrounding the author of that particular version of events, how much factual research is behind its dramatic re-enactments of history, and the fabular or moral lessons that it teaches. As an overt representation of Canada's military and social history, *Passchendaele*'s narrative of

---

[11] The films that belong to these subgenres, however, are not discrete and frequently possess feature overlapping characteristics that belong to several of the listed categories. For instance, Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937) and Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) are both WWI and antiwar films and Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998) are both WWII combat films that respectively communicate pro- and antiwar themes. There is no universal code of thematization for cinematically representing war. For every international conflict, from WWI to Vietnam to the second Iraq War, films that are for, against, or ambivalent about war have been, and will continue to be, produced. For more information on the vast variety of war films, consult Ivan Butler's *The War Film* (1974), Steven Jay Ruben's *Combat Films: 1945-1970* (1981), Stephen J. Curley and Frank J. Wetta's *Celluloid Wars* (1992), Robert Eberwein's *The War Film* anthology (2005), and James Chapman's *War and Film* (2008).

Canada's inchoate nationhood during the First World War, therefore, contains implications about the film's investment in the "real" story behind Canada's recorded history during WWI. Gross, like many other war film directors, filters his opinion of war and international conflict through a preconceived notion of honour. Donald Kagan provides a concise definition for honour's construction within the war movie genre when he argues that the concept involves "the search for fame and glory; the desire to escape shame, disgrace, and embarrassment; the wish to avenge a wrong and thereby to restore one's reputation; the determination to behave in accordance with certain moral ideals" (qtd. in Bayles 12). *Passchendaele*'s representation of honourable conduct during war strictly abides by Kagan's criteria for narratives of wartime honour, revealing the manner in which the film naturalizes a constructed mode of behaviour. Gross uses the war film genre as a way to construct a normative behavioral model for not only Canadian civilians, but also Canadian soldiers, during wartime[12]. The film's battlefield scenes contain no wanton barbarity, no unwarranted violence, no sexual activity, and the storyline centers around the redemptive journey of a soldier who feels that he has committed murder (or, perhaps, behaved in a manner that did not become a "proper" and "honourable" Canadian soldier). This preoccupation with militaristic honour aims at eliciting emotional spectatorial responses to *Passchendaele*'s story, and the war genre's often-conservative tropes certainly extend to the film's home-front scenes, which entirely neglect to represent important members of Canada's population during that period. *Passchendaele* marginalizes women, excludes homosexuals, and largely ignores aboriginal and other non-white Canadians during its representation of both Canada's army and the country's domestic national culture in 1917. *Passchendaele*'s employment of the war genre's codes

---

[12] Although Gross consistently maintains that *Passchendaele* does not contain any representations of WWI that allegorically extend to Canada's role in the Afghanistan War (which ended in 2012, but was ongoing during the film's production and release in 2008), he subtly supports Canada's military efforts in the Middle East: "I think we as Canadians are doing enough. It's not a total war. Our borders, our way of life, are not being threatened. But I think it would be useful to see Afghanistan as part of a pattern that could lead to something larger. I was one of those who actually supported mutually assured destruction because it actually gave us some stability. We've lost that and that world is a very dangerous place" (Posner A3). *Passchendaele*'s tacit instructions about proper and honourable behaviour during wartime certainly address the citizens of modern-day Canada and, as such, reflect a reactionary model of behaviour for people who are living in Canada during the country's twenty-first century wars.

and conventions, as well as its reliance upon honour in its enforcement of normative behavioral rules, extend to the non-violent representational arena of *Passchendaele*'s Calgary scenes. Despite the manner in which the war genre informs these home-front sequences, the film's depiction of Canada's civilian population fundamentally relies on the guidelines of another genre: the domestic melodrama.

The melodrama is a multifaceted genre that developed out films that were commonly designated as "women's films" or "weepies" (Singer 94). Ben singer argues that "'melodrama' as it is used today is all but synonymous with a set of subgenres that remain close to the hearth and emphasize a register of heightened emotionalism and sentimentality: the family melodrama, the maternal melodrama, the woman's film, the weepie, the soap opera, etc." (*ibid*.). The domestic melodrama is one of the subgenres that Singer omits from his list, but it features the same heightened emotional content that the scholar mentions in the previous quotation. Thomas Elsaesser argues that domestic melodramas feature characters that mainly internalize their conflicts and personal problems:

> The social pressures are such, the frame of respectability so sharply defined, that the range of 'strong' actions is limited. The tellingly impotent gesture, the social gaffe, the hysterical outburst replaces any more directly liberating or self-annihilating action, and the cathartic violence of a shoot-out or a chase becomes an inner violence, often one that the characters turn against themselves (524).

The traditions of the domestic melodrama that Elsaesser outlines primarily appear in *Passchendaele* during the scenes in which Dunne convalesces in Calgary. During these hometown sequences, Dunne engages in a romantic relationship with Sarah Mann and thereby embroils himself in her family's numerous problems. Subsequently, the soldier attempts to ameliorate the Manns' familial conflicts. These hometown scenes consistently feature clashes between the Mann family, Dunne, and their friends and neighbours that concentrate upon contentious topics such as the deaths of parents, xenophobic prejudices, drug addictions, and moral dilemmas regarding forcible or voluntary enlistment in the Canadian military. Many of these conflicts manifest themselves as the personal, internal

problems of *Passchendaele*'s characters, indicating the manner in which the film's plotline is guided by the codes and conventions of the melodrama genre.

Passchendaele's home-front segment features numerous scenes in which various characters perform self-destructive actions. These acts of self-destruction are presented as metaphorical and microcosmic representations of Canada's domestic and international struggles during WWI. Elsaesser maintains that "the melodrama often works… by a displaced emphasis, by substitute acts, by parallel situations and metaphoric connections" (527). *Passchendaele* presents Elsaesser's displaced emphases through the aforementioned scenes in which Sarah Mann frequently indulges her morphine addiction, David Mann enlists in the army despite his crippling asthma, the Manns are victimized at the hands of German-hating Calgarians, and Dunne endures the emotional tortures of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The film does not present these problems that emerge out of the social, cultural, and political pressures of living during the First World War, but, instead, foregrounds these issues as crises of selfhood. Consequently, *Passchendaele* transforms and condenses the widespread international strife and suffering of a world war to present a simplified and easily-digestible representation of Canada's domestic struggles between 1914 and 1918.

Like *Men with Brooms*, *Passchendaele*'s use of genre positions Gross as the focal point of both narrative codes and conventions. Dunne is the key figure in both the war and melodramatic plotlines of the film, foregrounding Gross as the lynchpin of both the film's fictional narrative and the representation of historical veracity. Additionally, since Michael Dunne is Gross' own grandfather, the connections between the storyline's codes and conventions and the star are very explicit. As a result, the film inextricably links Gross' star image to the use of genre codes because of his position as an actor within, and narrator of, history. The explicit connection between Gross and *Passchendaele*'s plot formula also significantly informs the manner in which the film was marketed.

The promotional materials that preceded *Passchendaele*'s theatrical release foreground a mixture of genre traditions, which questionably emphasize the film's status as a piece of historical fiction that provides as much truth as excitement. The film was primarily

promoted by three pieces of media: its trailer, its poster, and its website. Since all of the aforementioned methods of advertising provide insights into the film's thematization and mode of address, each one demands a brief individual examination of its attributes and goal. First, the official trailer begins with a male voiceover maintaining that "it was a time of innocence; it was a time of love; it was a time of war." Despite its brevity, this voiceover, which accompanies clips from Dunne's initial courtship of Sarah, their developing romance, and the beginning of the battle of Passchendaele, lays bare the film's dependence upon genre. Furthermore, the voiceover's first assertion is that Canadian culture during the First World War was innocent, which exemplifies the film's dubious assertion that Canada became a mature nation-state during the Great War. The trailer reifies *Passchendaele*'s nationalist discourse by inserting title cards that argue, "one man found his courage; one nation found its heroes; their story is our story; as the world came apart, a country came of age." This title card sequence is spliced into a fast-paced montage that juxtaposes images of Dunne's romantic relationship in Canada and soldiers enduring the violence of the battlefield. The trailer privileges *Passchendaele*'s war-film attributes over its use of melodrama, demonstrating the film's discursive positioning of war as a tragic, but necessary step in the process of nation building. The film's melodramatic qualities are evident in the unabashed nostalgia of the trailer (which is also present in the film proper). These scenes in Western Canada's pastoral landscapes also gain greater emotional weight when the peaceful, idyllic, and romantic images of early-twentieth century Anglophone Canadian life are compared with the brutal and sorrowful conditions of modern warfare. Moreover, the overt equalization of "one man" and "one nation" in the title cards presupposes Gross' personal stake in the film's representation of the past. When Gross is explicitly credited as the film's writer and director, and implicitly credited as its star, there is an imae of him as a soldier covered in mud. This image of the writer-director tacitly affirms that he has a right to narrative history. By placing Gross directly in the middle of the film's – and, by extension, the war's – action, the trailer implies that the star experienced the difficulties that real-life soldiers endured during the First World War by proxy. As such, Gross positions himself as a soldier within *Passchendaele*, an issue which will arise in this essay's discussion of the film's website. Gross' appearances in the trailer also reveal his own privileging of the

film's war sequences over its romantic scenes, positioning and crediting the writer-director as a soldier. Consequently, *Passchendaele*'s trailer provides an uneven mixture of genres that performs the problematic function of foregrounding the real-ness of the film's historical representation while, simultaneously, showing the intrinsic excitement of its narrative.

While *Passchendaele*'s trailer emphasizes its war film elements over its use of melodrama, the film's poster performs a different function. The most prominent image on the poster is a picture of Dunne and Mann passionately embracing each other underneath a small-print tagline that maintains "there is only one rule… [*sic*] don't die." The poster highlights Gross as a recognizable star in the poster, making the romantic gesture between the writer-director and Dhavernas loom over the subordinated image of sixteen soldiers in a single-file line. The poster privileges the film's predominant heterosexual romance, suggesting that the war, which is signified by the soldiers, essentially provides the backdrop for a story of personal struggles and internal conflict. The unindividuated soldiers, whose inverted image is reflected in the cloudy water that appears underneath the film's credits, illustrate the manner in which war and international conflict rob people of their individuality, turning them into shadows of their former selves. Furthermore, nationalist rhetoric and claims to historical veracity, which are omnipresent in the film's trailer, are nearly absent from the poster, gesturing toward its promotional foregrounding of the genre codes and conventions of the melodrama and war film. Despite the possible critical implications of these juxtapositions and the absence of a particular Canadian-ness, however, the *Passchendaele* poster largely simplifies the genre-mixture of Gross' film, simplifying its often-unwieldy story into a dipartite, high-concept representation narrative of love and war.

Finally, while *Passchendaele*'s trailer and poster differ in their application of genre codes and conventions to their respective methods of promotion, its website largely ignores Gross' employment of genre components and mainly focuses upon affirming the accuracy of the historical re-enactments in the film. The website is an aesthetically pleasing, thoroughly researched, intricately designed, and interactive collage of text, images, and film clips that affirm the film's claim to historical reality. Featuring

biographies for Gross and his cast, making-of featurettes, as well as *Passchendaele*'s trailer and poster, the website contains a large amount of information about the production history and the national history behind the film. Gross also wrote a blog for the website in which he ruminates upon the struggles of shooting an outdoor scene in rainy weather conditions, the need to accrue the correct types of guns and ammunition for the film's prop department, and many other trivial moments from the production. The website's most important features, however, are its "Battle of Passchendaele" and "Canada in the Great War" pages, in which historical overviews provide interested readers with official facts about Canada's involvement in World War One, from how many soldiers were wounded or killed during the Battle of Passchendaele to the amount of shells that decimated the eponymous Belgian town. The historical statistics and picture are also accompanied by a "Passchendaele Education Guide" for Canadian teachers, which can be downloaded electronically and distributed amongst students as educational tools. These educational tools directly equate *Passchendaele*'s dramatic representations of historical wartime events and actual historical facts, revealing Gross' investment in the reality of his film. Additionally, the website includes the personal correspondences of Michael Dunne during the First World War. These letters promote the personal dimension of Gross' version of history, simultaneously foregrounding the presence of the star's personal vision in *Passchendaele* and reifying the truth behind the film's high-concept concentration upon one protagonist. The website cleverly conflates Dunne (both real and fictional) and Gross, subtly promoting *Passchendaele*'s star as a writer of, and actor in, historical events. Despite their differences, the various advertising methods of *Passchendaele*'s promotional materials create multiple ways in which the film can be viewed: as a well-researched piece of historical fiction, as an ode to Canada's soldiers, as the culmination of a star's personal cinematic vision, and as a high-concept piece of action-packed and melodramatic filmmaking. These variegated options for viewing the film are intended to pique the interest many different subgroups within English-speaking Canada's filmgoing public, exposing Gross' overwhelming desire to please his audience. Gross' eagerness to please his audience resulted in a thematically and narratively unstable film, but *Passchendaele*'s failings still allowed the motion picture to receive a mixed, yet marginally positive, critical reception upon its release.

Passchendaele's domestic theatrical release was accompanied by a divided critical reception among prominent Canadian reviewers. Although all of the critics comment upon Gross' star persona and the historical material of the film, many of them differ in their attitudes towards the ways in which the writer-director achieves his lofty goal of creating a war film that addresses the heroic Canadian soldiers of the First World War. The positive reviews of *Passchendaele* focus upon the powerful and evocative realism of the film's battle scenes. Bruce Kirkland praises the realism of *Passchendaele*'s historical representation, arguing that the film is "a significant piece of Canadiana" whose "European battle scenes… are stunning. They are grim, bleak violent, capricious and horrifyingly realistic" ("Winning" E5). Here, Kirkland establishes a direct connection between the realism of the film's battle scenes and its supposed achievement of successfully communicating Canadian nationalistic ideals to its audience. Subsequently, the critic explicitly extrapolates upon *Passchendaele*'s national importance when he argues that the film is "a poignant and occasionally profound film out of a page in history. For that, all of Canada should be grateful" (*ibid.*). Kirkland metaphorically confirms the veracity of *Passchendaele*'s representation of the past when he argues that its story derives directly from the annals of Canadian history. Consequently, the critic demands that Canadian audiences express gratitude toward Gross for his accurate cinematic portrayals of the Canada's involvement in the First World War, demonstrating the way in which the star successfully effectively harnesses the realism of the war film genre.

Alternatively, Susan Cole, the film critic for *Now Magazine*, implicitly lauds the film's arguable critique of the reasons countries enter into wars, asserting that Canadian audiences should "credit the creators [of *Passchendaele*] for a timely film that questions why we go to war" (*Passchendaele* 98). Cole praises the supposedly critical questions Gross raises about war and its causes, an argument extended by *Exclaim*'s Hannah Guy when she argues that the film's love story "is one between director and country… this is Canada's coming-of-age story – a youth violated while still remaining steadfast under the onslaught of shells and death." Here, Guy suggests that Gross' star image is consistently in dialogue with Canada's violent journey to maturity. Consequently, the film's representation of history is successfully mediated through its star, demonstrating how its

dubiously anti-war sentiments are the product of a director who desires to please his audience.

This directorial yearning for spectatorial pleasure applies to the *Toronto Star*'s Peter Howell's affirmation of the film's romantic atmosphere when he maintains that it is "unabashedly romantic while also unyielding in its horrific images of World War I… *Passchendaele* succeeds on two fronts" (E1). Howell emphasizes the importance of the generic juxtaposition of the war-film and melodrama in *Passchendaele*, suggesting that the film's critique of war and its causes arises out of the tensions between Dunne's respective experiences of the home-front and the battlefield. The *Star* critic further argues that Gross' mixture of genres "is designed to appeal to a wide audience while providing a needed reminder of Canada's sacrifices during the Great War" (*ibid*.). Here, Howell affirms the assertions of Kirkland and Cole by implicitly praising *Passchendaele*'s realism and, by extension, suggesting that the film's supposedly educational content is entertaining enough to please casual audiences. The educational possibilities of *Passchendaele* are also championed by an anonymous editorial in *The National Post,* whose author argues that the film is "an ambitious, courageous, all-Canadian project… [an] account of the Battle of Passchendaele [that] is likely to serve as a teaching tool for generations" ("Support" A16). The editorial praises and champions the veracity of the historical representations in *Passchendaele*, revealing that the film's realistic depictions of wartime violence comprise the crux of its critical praise. Additionally, the unnamed author appropriately summarizes the connections positive reviewers draw between the realism of wartime representations and truth when he avows that "history, even in mythic forms, is the lifeblood of citizenship" (*ibid*.). The positive critical reception of *Passchendaele* reveals the manner in which its realistic representations of wartime violence create national myths that collate notions of heroism and nation-building, revealing the way in which the film communicates a problematic version of Canadian-ness.

One of the most salient preoccupations of the negative reviews of *Passchendaele* is the film's uneven use of genre traditions. *The National Post*'s Chris Knight argues that the film "spends its middle 70 minutes mired in melodrama," and overuses "cinematic

shorthand… the movie threatens to shudder to a stop under the weight of the symbolism" (PM 6). Despite the critic's negativity toward the film's pacing and thematization, he does praise Gross as "the Canadian for the job" and concedes that "this is the best [war film] we're likely to get" (*ibid*.). Knight's positivity contains barely-hidden tones of defeatism, suggesting that Gross was the only star with enough intrinsic Canadian-ness that could successfully create a high-concept nationalistic war film for Anglophone-Canada. The writer-director's failure, then, represents a failure for Canada's English-language film industry. This failure is also widely acknowledged by non-Canadian critics.

International critics mainly concentrate upon *Passchendaele*'s failure to articulate and achieve its goals as both a genre film and a piece of historical fiction. *Variety*'s Eddie Cockrell argues that Gross "reaches beyond his grasp; while clearly sincere, pic feels at once naïve in its cardboard characterizations and calculating in its depiction of war's horrors." Cockrell's criticism of Gross is confirmed by *Sight and Sound* film critic Geoffrey Macnab, who asserts that "Gross is too conventional a director… he risks moving the film into soft-centered, novelettish territory" (74). Macnab's concentration upon the weakness of *Passchendaele*'s melodramatic sequences gestures toward the way in which the film dulls the critical edge of its battle scenes by relying too much on maudlin scenes of romance and heroic behaviour to increase the emotional weight of each scene.

This concern about the film's detrimental use of melodrama is also furthered by Canadian critic Brian D. Johnson, the film reviewer for *Maclean's*. Johnson discerns that Gross' representation of Canadian military heroism is "far-fetched. His character is no Rambo… but he turns out to be a kind of Captain Canuck Christ figure, dedicated to the salvation of a weaker comrade and performing a stunt of magic-realist peace-keeping in the thick of battle." Here, Johnson suggests that *Passchendaele* relies upon obvious symbolism that makes its goals overly transparent, heightening the narrative's nationalistic fervour. This overuse of symbolism culminates in the film's final scene, wherein Dunne has to rescue a crucified Canadian soldier by carrying him across a battlefield in the same way Jesus carried his cross to Golgotha. The overdetermined Christian imagery of this scene

undeniably positions Dunne as the film's self-sacrificing saviour and, by extension, foregrounds Gross as Canada's cinematic hero. The film critic for *The Globe and Mail*, Liam Lacey, also critiques the overindulgences in *Passchendaele*'s storyline when he argues that the film frequently presents the outcome of certain personal or battlefield conflicts as predetermined by fate (R5). An example of this fatalistic tendency within *Passchendaele*'s plotline is Dunne's death at the conclusion of the film, which is prefigured by the aforementioned sequence in which he sacrifices himself by carrying a cross through a battlefield. Additionally, the fatidic aspects of the film connect to its generic mixture of melodrama and war, which Lacey also critiques.

Lacey addresses another important aspect of *Passchendaele*: its awkward mixture of genres. The critic argues that the film is "an old-fashioned weepie, mixed with a more modern depiction of the squalor and brutality of war… a sincere but awkward patchwork of hits and misses [that] tries to blend wide-canvas history with personal intimacy" (R5). While criticizing the film's uneven mixture of genres, Lacey also admonishes Gross' collation of personal and historical storytelling. The critic implicitly maintains that the writer-director places himself in a problematic position within the narrative in which he equates his grandfather's (and, by extension, his) personal story and the far-reaching tragedy of the First World War. The star's personality becomes too dominant within *Passchendaele*'s nationalistic discourse, creating a problematic tension between national and individual perspectives in the film.

The critical reception of *Passchendaele* overwhelmingly presupposes that the film is not an intellectual examination of why humans engage in warfare. This critical denial of the film's intellectual acumen had a significant effect on Gross' attitude toward his promotional interviews following the film's release. Unlike the populist and down-home persona that Gross cultivated his pre-release interviews for *Men with Brooms*, the writer-director promoted a high-brow public image prior to *Passchendaele*'s theatrical debut. In various interviews, Gross makes allusions to Homer's *Iliad* to illustrate his assertion that war has been a consistent human endeavour throughout history, alludes to disparities between classical music composers to demonstrate the differences between his two feature films, and aligns himself with Canada's art-house filmmakers, such as Atom

Egoyan (Posner A3; Cole "War Effort" 98; Kirkland "Following" 48). All of these actions suggest that Gross was attempting to erase his previous disavowal of Canada's art-house cinema and reveal himself as a serious artist in Anglophone-Canadian filmmaking. After critics revealed that the film was not an erudite analysis of modern warfare, however, Gross argued, in a post-release interview with Bruce Kirkland, that "my inclination is more populist, I suppose. I'm more interested in making movies less for the intelligentsia than for the people that I see going to the cinema when I go to the cinema" ("Populist" 36). Despite *Passchendaele*'s promotional campaign, which frequently portrays the film as a national cinematic event, Gross seemed to possess a conflicting desire to appeal to the "intelligentsia" prior to the release of his motion picture. In the previous quotation, however, Gross denies his high-brow aspirations and re-affirms his film's nationalistic populist intentions. The turnaround in Gross' persona suggests that, ultimately, the star wants to address and please a large amount of English-speaking Canadians. In other words, Gross wants to be Canada's producer of popular cinema.

Passchendaele was, by Anglophone-Canadian standards, very successful at the domestic box office. The film earned $940 000 in its first week, and went on to earn $4.43 million at the domestic box office (Adams; Parent 59). Although the film did not recoup a quarter of its cost during its theatrical run, it is considered to be a high-earner in English-speaking Canada. Alliance Vice President Carrie Wolfe confirms *Passchendaele*'s success when she asserts that "Canadians across the country have embraced the film" (Adams). The film also won six Genie Awards, including Best Motion Picture and the Golden Reel Award for highest-earning Canadian film of the year. Ultimately, *Passchendaele* was recognized, by the Canadian film industry and the country's audiences, as a popular success.

1.3 Conclusion

Liam Lacey, in his review for *Passchendaele*, maintains that Paul Gross is a "multi-hyphenate" artist who consistently seeks "the elusive grail of Canadian popular taste" (R5). Despite the deep-seated sarcasm of Lacey's remark, this quotation adequately sums

up Gross' body of work as both a director and star. From his early career as a Mountie to his more recent work as a director of cinematic Canadiana, Gross has achieved a distinction that is accomplished by very few of Canada's male filmmakers and actors: he is an Anglophone-Canadian star. The stories, performances, and subject matter of Gross' films all augment and build upon his established, all-Canadian star persona. In *Men with Brooms*, *Passchendaele*, and his upcoming Afghan War-film *Hyena Road*, Gross presents ideal and overdetermined versions of himself, his country, and the filmmaking practices he employs. Consequently, the mixture of genre cinema and star identity in Gross' filmmaking comes with its own set of spectatorial expectations, including nationalistic symbolism and themes, a likable protagonist, and familiarly romantic plot devices.

Although both *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele* foreground and promote questionable versions of Canada to their viewers, Gross has unrelentingly aimed at speaking to, and sometimes for, English-speaking Canadians. Gross attempts to be the all-Canadian male star, and often represents the heteronormative, Anglo-Saxon, and stereotyped Canadian-ness that is entailed by such a celebrity persona. This problematic persona, however, has allowed the star to achieve relative success within Canada's borders, despite that his films seem to experience mediocre attendance at the box office. The question that accompanies the apparent box-office failures of Gross' two films, however, is whether or not his attempts to create an Anglophone-Canadian popular cinema are successful. Objectively, *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele* are critical and financial failures, but they are two of the most popular English-language Canadian films of all time. The paradoxical truth of Gross' films is that they are both successes and failures. They are successes because they achieve the box-office receipts that a majority of Anglo-Canadian films fail to receive; they are failures because they both opened in over 150 screens across the country and still failed to recoup their production and advertising costs. This paradox inevitably raises queries about the definition of success in Anglophone-Canadian cinema. Ultimately, though, Gross' films' production history, promotional campaigns, reception, and box-office performance reveal that there is not a single version of Canadian popular taste. The cinema of Paul Gross is just one example of English-language popular filmmaking in Canada. It is necessary to examine other films and filmmakers that aim to create a popular cinema in English-speaking Canada before

discussing definitions of success within that industry. After all, Gross is not the only seeker of the grail.

Chapter 2

Welcome Back to Our Developing Horror Story: *Pontypool* and *Splice*

The sisters of a sorority house who do not return home to visit their parents over Christmas vacation are tormented and hunted by a stalker who lives in the crawlspaces and attic of their building. A parasite engorges the collective sex drive of residents of a suburban Montréal high-rise complex. A bereaved composer moves into an old manor and is haunted by the morbid history of the house's former occupants. The teenagers of a small mining town are systematically murdered by one of the mine's employees on Valentine's Day. During the construction of a teleportation device, a scientist accidentally fuses a housefly's DNA with his own, becoming a grotesque human-insect hybrid. A serendipitously assembled group of people use mathematics and physics to travel through an enormous underground labyrinth filled with deadly traps. Two teenage sisters, socially ostracized from the rest of their small-town, have their relationship tested when the older sibling becomes a werewolf. A linguistically-spread zombie virus infects the residents of a rural Ontario town. A pair of scientists constructs a mutant baby that poses both a physical and sexual threat to the couple as it matures. What do all of these disparate situations have in common? They are all plotlines of Anglophone Canadian horror films.

The preceding sentences respectively summarize *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark 1974), *They Came from Within* (David Cronenberg 1975), *The Changeling* (Peter Medak 1980), *My Bloody Valentine* (George Mihalka 1981), *The Fly* (David Cronenberg 1986), *Cube* (Vincenzo Natali 1997), *Ginger Snaps* (John Fawcett 2000), *Pontypool* (Bruce McDonald 2008), and *Splice* (Vincenzo Natali 2010). This list is not an exhaustive index of English-language Canadian horror films, but, instead, is a compilation of some of Canada's most significant and enduring contributions to the horror genre in the last thirty-eight years[13].

[13] Despite the lack of critical praise for *Black Christmas*, *They Came from Within*, *The Brood*, and *My Bloody Valentine* upon their respective theatrical release dates, these films have nonetheless stayed within the cultural consciousness *via* late-night television screenings and successful reissues on VHS and DVD,

Whereas Paul Gross and his films, which were discussed in the last chapter, represent an overly positive, nationalist perspective in English-language Canadian filmmaking, Canada's well-established horror tradition shows the dark-side of the country's cinematic practices. Horror cinema has been a mainstay of popular English-language Canadian filmmaking since the successes of low-budget exploitation films during the nation's Tax Shelter Era[14]. Since then, governmental organizations such as Telefilm and the Ontario Media Development Corporation (OMDC) have fostered the production of a healthy body of English-language Canadian horror films for both domestic and international audiences. In the twenty-first century, Anglophone Canada has made a small, but potent, amount of entries into the annals of the nation's horror film history. These twenty-first century horror films have been released to varying box office and critical success, however, and this essay will focus upon two of those films. First the zombie-oriented *Pontypool* will provide an example of a commercially unsuccessful entry to Canada's popular horror tradition and, secondly, the body-horror nightmare *Splice* will demonstrate a more successful endeavour to create a popular contemporary Canadian horror film. Before these films can be further analyzed, however, it is necessary to provide some context for Canada's twenty-first century horror cinema, beginning with a clear delineation of horror as a film genre.

Especially when compared to other cinematic genres, horror is slippery and difficult to define. Brigid Cherry argues that "notions of what the horror genre might be – or should be – are constantly shifting… we might, therefore, want to think about horror as an umbrella term encompassing several different subcategories of horror film, all united by

---

eventually being seen as canonical films by critics and audiences alike (Vatnsdal 92; 101-102; 123-125; 144-147). Furthermore, the influence of these films is evident in not only Canadian horror films, but horror cinema in general. Some of the aforementioned films even engendered twenty-first century American remakes, such as *Black Christmas* (Glen Morgan 2006) and *My Bloody Valentine* (Patrick Lussier 2009). The latter remake was even formatted in 3-D, further emphasizing its blockbuster goals.

[14] The Tax Shelter Era took place between roughly between 1978 and 1982, when "the loophole allowing for 100% write-off on Canadian film investment was first introduced… doctors, dentists, architects: anyone who had a bit of money they wanted to protect from the greedy fingers of the government would shovel it into a film" (Vatnsdal 121).

their capacity to horrify" (4). Cherry enumerates seven subcategories of horror cinema: the gothic (adaptations of classic horror tales, such as Tod Browning's 1931 version of *Dracula*), supernatural films (stories about unholy phenomena, such as *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski 1968)), psychological horror (exploring psychoses, such as serial killer films), monster movies (which includes the zombie subgenre), slasher films (usually features teenagers menaced by a stalker, like *My Bloody Valentine*), body horror or splatter films (featuring unnatural and grotesque physical transformations, like *The Fly*), and exploitation (ultraviolent) films (5-6). These seven categories frequently overlap and rarely exist in pure forms, but they collectively serve as a foundational outline for the various aspects of horror cinema. Furthermore, Cherry asserts that "the genre's longevity may… be due to the fact that the depiction of such horrors is often regarded as being – at worst – dangerous and – at best – somewhat disreputable. Horror cinema's 'outsider' status derives largely from the fact that… it is designed to elicit negative emotions in the viewer" (12). Despite horror's mainstream appeal, the genre is often maligned as exploitative and unenjoyable by both critics and audiences. Ironically, the horror genre's negative effect on its audience has also produced its popularity, which suggests that spectators enjoy being made to feel scared, uncomfortable, and, sometimes, unhappy while watching a film. Cherry's numerous assertions and equivocations about horror, therefore, suggest that the genre is mainly concerned with eliciting spectatorial pleasure through the paradoxical creation of viewer discomfort, whether that effect is achieved aesthetically or through a film's narrative. Arguably, no other filmmaker has achieved notoriety by consistently straddling the line between eliciting viewer pleasure and provoking spectatorial disgust more than Anglophone Canadian director David Cronenberg.

The above list features only two titles by David Cronenberg, which somewhat belies the significance of his work in English-language Canadian horror cinema. Cronenberg's internationally-successful corpus of films has made him not only Canada's pre-eminent horror filmmaker, but also one of English-speaking Canada's most famous directors. Accordingly, Caelum Vatnsdal argues that "the very idea of a Canadian horror movie to this day invites one of two responses: either the assumption that you must be talking about David Cronenberg, or simple astonishment that such things even exist" (12). It is

undeniable that Cronenberg's *oeuvre* contains more critically and commercially significant late-twentieth century horror films than any other Canadian director. William Beard argues that "Cronenberg is the most substantial and important feature-filmmaker English-Canada has produced… giving rise to cult-devotion, museum retrospectives, cultural prizes, international conferences, and book-length critical studies in four languages. He is the largest object in our cinematic landscape" (144-145). Although Beard's avowal of Cronenberg's status as the most important Anglophone Canadian filmmaker is certainly hyperbolic, the previous quotation reveals the overpowering influence and presence of the director in Canada's horror cinema. However, the aforementioned list's inclusion of many well-known horror films by directors other than Cronenberg also demonstrates that Canadian horror cinema is not strictly Cronenbergian. Instead, Canada's horror cinema incorporates a multitude of perspectives, visual styles, and subgenres, such as slasher films, body horror films, monster films, and haunted house films. Furthermore, Vatnsdal's secondary assertion that a majority of film audiences would simply be surprised to learn that Canadians produce horror movies at all elides the consistent, influential, recognizable, and even controversial collection of horror films that Canada has released since the early-1970s.

Additionally, Cronenberg's films have changed significantly since the late-1980s, when his creative focus apparently shifted away from gruesome genre traditions and toward the more culturally-acceptable arena of prestige filmmaking[15]. With *Dead Ringers* (1988), Cronenberg began his gradual transition away from horror cinema. The shifting aesthetics of Canada's most notable horror auteur, along with the end of a highly-successful string of English-language Canadian slasher films such as *My Bloody Valentine*, *Terror Train* (Roger Spottiswoode 1980), and *Prom Night* (Paul Lynch 1980)

[15] Prestige films often stand in opposition to genre cinema. Although it could be argued that Cronenberg has never fully abandoned his horror roots, *Dead Ringers* (1988), *Naked Lunch* (1991), *M. Butterfly* (1993), *Crash* (1996), *Spider* (2002), *A History of Violence* (2005), *Eastern Promises* (2007), *A Dangerous Method* (2011), and *Cosmopolis* (2012) are all dramas that contain horrifically violent scenes but certainly do not employ the codes and conventions that are so salient in Cronenberg's pre-1988 films. The director's 1997 film, *eXistenZ*, is a brief return to horror, but most of his post-*Dead Ringers* films are critically acclaimed literary adaptations that, while harrowing and disturbing, are certainly more concerned with their actors' performances, character-development, and the complexity of their stories rather than special effects or gory endings.

earlier in the 1980s, allowed for both new and veteran filmmakers to revise horror codes and conventions in the 1990s and 2000s.

The chronological order of this essay's initial list of Canadian horror films illustrates that Canada's output of horror cinema slowed down in the 1990s. Moreover, the notable horror films that were released, such as *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg 1997), *Cube*, and *Ginger Snaps* are genre hybrids that blend horror with either science fiction or teenage melodrama in their stories and aesthetic strategies. The most salient aspect of English-language Canadian horror films of the late-1990s is their self-reflexive treatment of genre codes and conventions. In the same way that the American slasher film *Scream* (Wes Craven 1996) reveals and parodies the traditions of its gory subgenre by portraying its teenage murder victims as self-aware and cinema-literate commentators on its plotline's predictability and character archetypes, *eXistenZ*, *Cube*, and *Ginger Snaps* deal with the horrors of new technologies and identity crises in ways that both satirize and lay bare genre tropes in order to comment on common cultural millennial anxieties. At the dawn of the new millennium, however, the cheeky self-reflexivity of late-twentieth century horror movies began to wane. Cherry maintains that "horror cinema… has always appeared rather more flexible and adaptable in its encompassing of the cultural moment, giving scope for filmmakers to encode changing socio-cultural concerns with ease" (11). This adaptability was proven at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the genre revisionism and reflexivity that was prevalent in 1990s horror cinema became less satirical. Increasingly, twenty-first century horror films revised the genre's traditional representational and aesthetic strategies to discover new ways to shock, scare, and disgust their viewers.

This renewed earnestness in twenty-first century horror cinema can be traced back to the international trauma associated with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Laura Frost argues that "given horror film's history of engaging – however perversely – contemporary sources of fear, anxiety, and political strife, it is not surprising to see this genre responding to 9/11… we expect horror to play the role of provocateur: the genre that will go where no genre has gone before, however taboo" (16). Hollywood increased its production of horror movies during the decade after 9/11, gesturing toward the genre's

renewed meaning and popularity in the twenty-first century. Post-9/11 Hollywood began producing a popular horror cinema that mainly released remakes that augmented the violence of their provenances, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel 2003) and *Halloween* (Rob Zombie 2007), and new forms of zombie and vampire monster films, such as *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder 2004), *Land of the Dead* (George A. Romero 2005) and *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwicke 2008). Hollywood even created the "torture porn" sub-genre, which was originated by films like *Saw* (James Wan 2004) and *Hostel* (Eli Roth 2005). All of the aforementioned films were financial successes, signalling a renewed widespread audience interest in horror films[16]. Tom Gunning explains the reason for contemporary horror cinema's popularity when he argues that "the horror film, in many ways, even though it may respond to social traumas… ultimately hits someplace else. In many ways, the social trauma opens the door, but then you plummet into some of the most primal elements… really psychological terms" (qtd. in Frost 33). Here, Gunning suggests that horror films often use a collective cultural trauma to access the emotions of their audiences, but ultimately defer the "real" problem by focusing on a monstrous villain or psychological issue. Therefore, very few American horror films from the 2000s actually addressed 9/11, but their routine violence and barbarity created a distraction from the real-life traumas of terrorism and war. Consequently, horror films became an extreme form of escapist distraction, which is a main tenet of popular cinema. Although both Frost's and Gunning's arguments primarily pertain to twenty-first century Hollywood horror cinema, their arguments about the genre's popularity also pertain to contemporary Canadian movies.

The upswing in the popular successes of American horror cinema was a trend that producers of English-language films in Canada noticed. Revealing the effect that horror's renewed popularity had upon Canadian film producers, Telefilm executive Stephanie

---

[16] *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* cost $9.5 million and grossed $110 million in worldwide theatrical revenue (Fleming). *Halloween* cost $15 million and grossed $80 million in worldwide theatrical revenue (Boo). *Dawn of the Dead* cost $26 million and grossed $59 million domestically ("Dawn"). *Land of the Dead* cost $15 million and grossed $20 million domestically ("Land"). *Twilight* cost $37 million and grossed $192 domestically ("Twilight"). *Saw* cost $1.2 million and grossed $55 million domestically, spawning six sequels ("Saw"). *Hostel* cost $4.8 million and grossed $47 million domestically.

Azam recently maintained that "at a certain point, we looked at our portfolio and said – 'there are way too many dramas'" (qtd. in Kelly 8). While discussing several Anglo-Canadian horror films, including *Splice* and *Tucker and Dale Vs. Evil* (Eli Craig 2010), Azam further avowed that, as of 2010, 60% of Telefilm's budget funded genre cinema, which is a significant increase in the funding of popular filmmaking in Canada (*ibid.*). Like recent American horror projects, twenty-first century Anglophone Canadian horror films revise and update the genre's codes and conventions to become what Todd Berliner calls "Genre Benders" (25). Unlike "Genre Breakers," like *Scream* and *Ginger Snaps*, genre benders "do not expose their genre's ideological weaknesses… instead, [they] exploit our traditional habitual responses to generic conventions in order to set us up for their unconventional outcomes" (27). In other words, twenty-first century Canadian horror films refuse to invite the audience's participation in the predictability of genre formula; instead, they scare and shock spectators by making familiar tropes unfamiliar and unpredictable. Consequently, both contemporary American and Canadian horror films return to the horror genre's core goal: to inspire fright and disgust. This genre-oriented earnestness indicates the aim at popularity that is present in contemporary English-language Canadian horror cinema. *Splice* and *Pontypool* are two important examples of contemporary Canadian horror cinema that feature very different production, aesthetic, and narrative strategies, but aspire to similar forms of popularity among domestic and international audiences. Both of the aforementioned films exhibit forms of genre revisionism that, while possessing sociopolitical implications, mainly attempt to inject new ways of horrifying their audiences. In their attempt to reinvigorate twenty-first century Anglophone Canadian horror cinema, *Pontypool* and *Splice* achieved starkly varied degrees of popular success.

2.1 The Talking Dead: *Pontypool*

Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz argue that zombie-horror films depict "a serial process of infection, by means of which humanity is systematically… compelled towards [a] condition of permanent inertia, a perpetual motion of (animated) inanimate matter" (3). The infection to which Boluk and Lenz refer is frequently spread through acts of physical aggression and violence, such as biting or scratching. These modes of viral transmission

are integral to the plot development of zombie films and often give the films their metaphorical significances. Bruce McDonald's 2008 zombie-horror film *Pontypool* rewrites the conventions of the zombie genre by depicting a linguistically-spread virus that gradually infects the entire population of a small Ontario town. The film tells the story of morning-show radio host Grant Mazzy (Stephen McHattie), his producer Sidney Briar (Lisa Houle), and the program's sound technician Laurel-Ann Drummond (Georgina Reilly) during a viral outbreak of cannibalism in the eponymous town of Pontypool, Ontario. With the exception of an early scene in which Mazzy drives to work in the pre-dawn morning, the events of *Pontypool* occur within the confines of the church basement where the characters record and broadcast their radio show. The film's claustrophobic environment and small roster of characters conjure comparisons with the cottage settings and captive casts of canonical zombie films like George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981), and, more recently, *House of the Dead* (Uwe Boll 2003). McDonald differentiates *Pontypool* from other zombie films by reinventing the standard cannibalism-inducing virus as a contagion that spreads through the English language. As a result, *Pontypool* stages a Romero-esque, allegorical story that both humorously and scarily critiques Canada's bilingual culture. This allegory is elucidated at the film's conclusion when Mazzy and Sidney speak French to avoid the English language's viral infection. This symbolism is not ideologically positive, however, because neither McDonald nor Tony Burgess, the film's screenwriter, attempts to pacify the disrupting forces within the motion picture. Instead *Pontypool* resists nationalist impulses by representing an apocalyptic conclusion that arises out of a bilingual miscommunication. Consequently, the film debunks images of a coherent Canada at the conclusion of the narrative. Ironically, this refusal of nationalistic cohesion also provides *Pontypool* with its distinctly Canadian perspective. Through depictions of a diseased bilingualism, the film reinvents the zombie-film template to create a uniquely Canadian entry into the horror genre.

Pontypool's uniqueness extends to its production history. According to McDonald, the director began to gather the film's $1.5 million budget during a casual conversation outside Toronto's Horseshoe Tavern (Hays "Talking"). This serendipitous meeting eventually caused *Pontypool* to be financed by a group of private investors led by J.

Miles Dale, a long-time fan of McDonald's work (Glassman). This unusual funding arrangement allowed McDonald to work on the film without financial assistance from governmental corporations such as Telefilm and the OMDC. Since McDonald did not have to go through standard governmental channels to fund *Pontypool*, he was given enough creative control to produce a truly unusual zombie-art film (*ibid*.). *Pontypool*'s esoteric peculiarities were not lost on Dale, however, who maintained, in an interview with *Playback* magazine, that the film "isn't 3000-screen horror porn. This is a platform, word-of-mouth film" (qtd. in Glassman). When it debuted at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival, *Pontypool* was bought by Lions Gate Films subsidiary Maple Pictures for distribution in Canada and IFC Films for exhibition in the United States. In accordance with Dale's assertion that *Pontypool* would benefit from a word-of-mouth advertising campaign, the film's marketing budget was very small and produced only one trailer and one poster.

Pontypool's promotional materials gesture toward the film's use of sound and language as loci for horrific events. The trailer emphasizes the way in which the film uses audio recordings to create scary moments. Since *Pontypool* contains very few glimpses of actual zombies and refrains from excessively gory scenes, the trailer cleverly summarizes the tense relationship between the three main characters and the madness of the world outside their radio station. Images of sound recording devices, sin waves, and televisions pervade the trailer, foregrounding all of the dialogue, image, and sound media that are omnipresent in the film. Also, the trailer features rapid cuts between various scenes and shots, adding to the unknowable and disorienting questions surrounding the infection in *Pontypool*'s story. Except for the conclusion of the trailer, in which Mazzy tells the audience to refrain from translating the voiceover narration, there are no promotional evocations of the film's bilingual subject matter. This elision of *Pontypool*'s linguistic concerns suggests that the film's promotional materials privilege the film's horror-film attributes over its Canadian qualities.

While *Pontypool*'s trailer tends to focus upon sound effects and frightening audio recordings, the film's poster advertises its genre revisions through subtle visual cues. The poster uses blood splatters to form a picture of Grant Mazzy's stunned face. The top of

Mazzy's head seems to have exploded, which not only evokes *Pontypool*'s horrific plotline, but also demonstrates how the film's viral infection ruins victims' brains rather than their bodies. At the top-left of the poster, a tagline exclaims, "shut up or die." This tagline, in conjunction with the headphones that appear in Mazzy's bloody image, demonstrates the danger of the film's linguistically spread virus. Like the trailer, *Pontypool*'s poster does not gesture toward the bilingual themes at the film's core. *Pontypool*'s promotional materials and their respective concentrations upon sound and audio equipment gesture toward the means by which the film achieves its horror-film status. This emphasis upon genre codes and conventions largely elides *Pontypool*'s cerebral and esoteric bilingual themes, demonstrating how, despite its cerebral concept, the film's promotional campaign contains an intrinsic aim toward popularity among both Canadian and international audiences.

Although *Pontypool* did not accrue a large amount of reviews upon its theatrical release, its small critical reception was generally mixed. English reviewers were almost entirely negative about *Pontypool*, mainly criticizing the film's linguistic subject matter. In Philip French's review for *The Observe*r, he argues that the film "starts to get a little sticky, even risible, when it appears that the virus driving people mad is carried by words." Similarly, *The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw maintains that the film is an "utterly baffling and stunningly boring… satire on the insidious way Anglo-Saxon culture is eroding the proud identity of French Canadians." *The Independent*'s Anthony Quinn, however, is more positive about *Pontypool*'s themes, asserting that the linguistic zombie virus is "ingenious but unsatisfying." American reviewers, like their English peers, criticize the McDonald's ability to properly develop *Pontypool*'s complex concept into an interesting horror film. In his review for *The New York Times*, Stephen Holden argues that "*Pontypool* barely develops a premise that has all kinds of implications about the mass media (talk radio in particular) and the degradation of language in a culture overrun with hyperbole, jargon, disinformation and contrived drama." Similarly, the opinions of *Variety*'s Rob Nelson and *The Village Voice*'s Melissa Anderson can be summed up by the latter's avowal that "for a film about the perils of too much talk, there's quite a lot of babbling presented as profundity. The political statements in *Pontypool*… seem all the less provocative for appearing several years too late." Strangely, Holden, Nelson, and

Anderson condemn *Pontypool* for supposedly disseminating out-of-date political discourses that the film does not, in fact, communicate. The critics' desire for the film to be about mass media and radio-babble causes them to ignore the film's allegorical implications for Canadian culture.

Canadian critics mainly praised *Pontypool* for its use of the zombie subgenre to make political statements about Canada's divided society and culture. *The Toronto Star*'s Peter Howell complimented the film for its quintessentially Canadian subject matter, discerning that "*Pontypool* is understandably being sold as a horror movie, seeing as how it has rampaging zombies and all. But it also strikes me as the most Canadian of satires, and all the better for it… Bilingualism suddenly becomes not just a government mandate, but also a life-or-death necessity" ("Pontypool"). Similarly, Stephen Cole of *The Globe and Mail* asserts that "Pontypool is being destroyed by a virus spread through the English language. McDonald uses the theme to mount a wickedly funny bit of distinctly Canadian satire." Both Howell and Cole salute *Pontypool*'s Canadian-ness by acknowledging that the film's genre revisions create a type of horror filmmaking that addresses Canada's specific social and cultural issues. Commenting further on the film's genre revisionism, *Now Magazine*'s Norman Wilner maintains that "*Pontypool* offers a claustrophobic, conceptual spin on the zombie horror genre that goes for the mind as well as the throat." Upon its theatrical release, Canadian critics were more positive about *Pontypool* than both English and American reviewers, praising the film's new versions of the zombie subgenres conventions, as well as its nationalist specificity. The film was universally complimented for its tension and suspense, however, suggesting that it was successful as a simple zombie-horror film. It is impossible to ignore *Pontypool*'s particular Canadian-ness, however, and this national specificity did not translate well with international audiences.

Pontypool performed very poorly during its theatrical run, earning only $3,865 domestically and $28,253 internationally. Consequently, the film did not come remotely close to recouping its $1.5 million budget. The film, therefore, can be seen as a cautionary tale for Anglophone-Canadian genre films. The Canadian specificity and complicated concept of *Pontypool*, along with the film's lukewarm critical reception,

undoubtedly led to its financial downfall. Although *Pontypool* is a clever zombie movie with an excellent premise, the film's unfortunate box office failure caused it to be a little-known casualty of Anglophone Canadian popular cinema. *Pontypool* does not represent the only English-language Canadian attempt at creating a popular twenty-first century horror cinema, horror. Vincenzo Natali's *Splice* provides an oppositional, and more successful, example of Canada's English-language horror cinema.

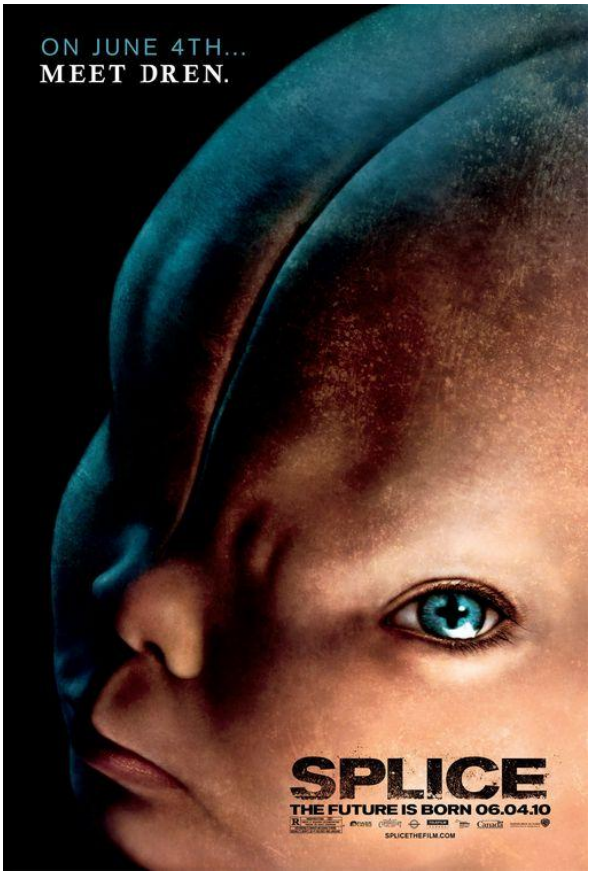
2.2 A Test-Tube Seductress: *Splice*

Unlike *Pontypool*, Vincenzo Natali's *Splice* is an example of successful Anglophone Canadian horror filmmaking that does not overemphasize its Canadian-ness. *Splice* is a body horror film about Clive Nicoli (Adrien Brody) and Elsa Kast (Sarah Polley), a romantically-entangled pair of scientists who work in the field of genetic engineering. The couple creates genetically-modified creatures whose tissues synthesize hormones and chemicals that could potentially cure deadly human diseases. Clive and Elsa's laboratory, Nucleic Exchange Research and Development (or, as an acronym, NERD), is owned by a pharmaceutical company that cautiously encourages their work, knowing that the scientists' creations contain the potential for breakthrough products and, consequentially, larger profits. One day, after several failed experiments and being forbidden by their superiors from attempting to either clone or modify human DNA, Elsa implants an embryo with her own genetic material. Subsequently, the couple is burdened with a secret child who possesses both human and non-human DNA. The creature, who Elsa names Dren (Delphine Chanéac), an anagram for "nerd," matures at an accelerated pace, and soon becomes both a physical and sexual threat to both of her adoptive parents. Dren causes both Elsa and Clive to perform sexual and violent acts that become increasingly depraved and desperate as the film progresses. *Splice*'s fusion of psychosexual horror and scientific intrigue undoubtedly reveals its close allegiances with Cronenberg's early films, but it also explores new avenues of psychological body horror.

As the above plot synopsis demonstrates, *Splice* mixes science fiction elements into its foundation of horror tropes and traditions. Since the film's horror attributes arise out of its character's misfortunate genetic experiments, Natali inextricably links the two

aforementioned genres. *Splice*'s generic amalgamation runs counter to Paul Wells' argument that the cinematic combination of horror and science-fiction is incongruous. The scholar maintains that this incongruity exists because "the horror genre is predominantly concerned with death and the impacts and effects of the past, while science fiction is future-oriented" (7). Expanding upon Wells' definition of Science-Fiction as future oriented, Sean Redmond asserts that science-fiction "can involve futuristic gadgets, weaponry, clothing, housing and transportation… but science fiction can also involve the mere 'copying' of existing social and cultural relations so that what the audience sees and hears in part resembles closely the world as it is experienced on a daily basis" (2). Since science-fiction takes everyday social and cultural practices and issues pertaining to the time in which the film was made and adapts them to life in the future, the genre's stories merely reference the present day. Whereas science-fiction is speculative about the future, horror frequently speculates about the present, and this speculative nature is often where the two genres intersect. Steve Neale compellingly maintains that "it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish between horror and science fiction" (85). Here, Neale suggests that horror and science fiction are comparable because they both engage in highly speculative modes of filmmaking. Indeed, horror filmmakers have often mixed science fiction into their films, which include canonical horror texts like *Frankenstein* (James Whale 1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale 1935), and, more recently, *Alien* (Ridley Scott 1979) (85). Natali even acknowledges *Splice*'s cinematic lineage by naming the film's protagonists after Colin Clive and Elsa Lanchester, who respectively played the eponymous mad scientist and his monster's paramour in *Bride of Frankenstein*. *Splice* addresses very immediate concerns about cloning human and animal DNA, which the United Kingdom legalized in 2007 (Johnson 78). Therefore, like *Frankenstein*, *Splice* uses present-day fears about scientific progress to construct a culturally relevant horror story that resists the fantastical narratives that are commonly associated with science fiction. Although *Splice* immediately seems futuristic, the scientific practices of its main characters gradually become eerily familiar and frighteningly possible in the present-day. As a result, *Splice*'s hybrid genre DNA remains rooted in horror.

In addition to *Splice*'s generic hybridity, the film possesses an extremely mixed national identity. Natali's film is a $26.5 million co-production between Canada and France. Telefilm and the OMDC supplied one-third of its budget and Gaumont, a successful French studio, invested the remainder (Johnson 78). *Splice* also received a $32 million marketing remit from the American company Dark Castle Entertainment, which is a subsidiary of Warner Bros (*ibid.)*. The two stars of the film, Sarah Polley and Adrien Brody, are respectively Canadian and American and have built their artistic reputations in both domestic and international industries. Despite the internationalism of *Splice*'s funding, production, marketing, and performance credits, the film is widely considered to be Canadian[17]. Since Canadian producers committed the least amount of funding the *Splice*, there is an inherent contradiction within the film's status as a Canadian project. *Splice*'s funding sources notwithstanding, the film's Canadian-ness can be attributed to four aspects of *Splice*'s production: Anglophone Canadian director Vincenzo Natali, his Canadian co-scriptwriters Antoinette Terry Bryant and Doug Taylor, the creative trio's Cronenbergian influences, and the film's setting and shooting locations in Toronto (Howell "Splice"). Undoubtedly, the aforementioned credentials for *Splice*'s Canadian-ness neglect to answer questions and assuage concerns about whether or not a film that is not predominantly funded with Canadian money is actually Canadian. Anglophone Canadian



[17] Many prominent Canadian film critics, including Peter Howell, Rick Groen, Matthew Hays, and Brian D. Johnson have discussed *Splice* as a Canadian production, a claim that suggests that the film's roots are fundamentally, and importantly, in Canada.

cinema, and Canada's filmmaking in general, has become increasingly transnational in the twenty-first century, causing questions about the national provenances of films to become more arbitrary[18]. Consequently, *Splice*'s particular Canadian-ness is determined through its mostly-Canadian production credits and setting, instead of its international funding sources. *Splice* certainly benefited from its international finances, which allowed its advertising campaign to be both creative and far-reaching.

Splice's promotional materials mainly consisted of two posters and a theatrical trailer, both of which emphasized the same aspect of the film: Dren. Consequently, the film's advertising focuses upon selling it as a body horror and monster film. The first poster is a stark, portrait of Dren as a little girl (fig. 7). The image has an ominous black background and focuses mainly upon the creature's face, emphasizing the pronounced canyon-like split along her cranial ridge. This portrait contains a tagline in the top-right corner that reads, "Meet Dren," accentuating Dren's uncanny status of simultaneously being both recognizably human and grotesquely non-human. The first poster does not divulge a lot of information about *Splice*, but its emphasis upon Dren suggests that the film abides by the classic Hollywood monster-movie style, which "demands full visibility, fetishizing the monster within the overarching course of stardom" (Hantke 101). By highlighting the image of Dren as a little girl, the first poster attempts to create a monster iconography that is similar to Boris Karloff in *Frankenstein* and Bela Lugosi in *Dracula*. *Splice*'s second poster positions Dren in the middle of its image's frame and displays her standing ominously in the NERD laboratory. Along the top of the poster, a tagline discerns that "she's not human… not entirely" while Dren looms threateningly over the shadowy figures of Elsa and Clive. The second poster shows Dren's matured female body in its entirety, exhibiting her dangerous, whip-like tail, her leporine feet, and her hairless head. The tagline of the second poster illustrates that the horror of Dren is her not-quite-human status, which spurs curiosity by begging the question, "what is it?" Strangely, neither poster advertises the collective star power of the Brody and Polley, who respectively won

[18] As of 2009, Telefilm has 55 registered co-production treaties with 52 countries. Additionally, 2011, the corporation engaged in 45 international co-production projects ("Statistics").

and got nominated for Academy Awards. This apparent lack of marketing interest in Brody and Polley demonstrates how *Splice*'s advertisers wanted to foreground Dren as the film's main, terrifying attraction.

Unlike *Splice*'s posters, the film's trailer mostly hides Dren from view and, instead, focuses upon both the film's pre-occupation with the ramifications of human cloning and its two principal actors. Again, the trailer does not mention Brody and Polley's cinematic credentials, but it depends more on dialogue and performance than most contemporary theatrical trailers, which tend to focus upon singular images. Consequently, the star's emotional performances play a key role in the trailer's promotional strategy. By focusing upon the horrified reactions that *Splice*'s human characters exude when they meet Dren instead of the creature's physical attributes, the trailer leaves nearly all of the film's horrific scenes and aspects undisclosed. This advertising method builds interest surrounding Dren's appearance and deeds. Consequently, *Splice*'s trailer and posters seemingly work in tandem, respectively showing the human and monstrous attributes of the film without revealing any of its horrors. *Splice*'s opaque promotional materials did not prepare critics for the film's horrific subject matter, which resulted in a largely mixed critical reception.

Splice accrued a wide variety of reviews from English-speaking countries in both Europe and North America when it was theatrically released. Although the film received many positive reviews, some critics became passionate detractors against its representational strategies and genre-bending, resulting in a decidedly varied critical reception. English reviewers mainly disagreed upon the film's execution of its narrative. Rizov Vadim of *Sight and Sound* discerns that *Splice* "creates the illusion of being a densely packed parable but it isn't noticeable… most of the big talking points never get explicated" (75). The critic further concretizes his suggestion that the film's cautionary story is unconvincing when, referring to a scene in which Clive and Dren fornicate, the critic argues that the narrative eventually "becomes so ludicrous that it can't sustain itself" (*ibid.*). *The Daily Express*' Allan Hunter shares Vadim's opinion about Natali's underwhelming execution of his own story, maintaining that "*Splice* has a clever enough premise that the screenplay never explores in any great depth. The dialogue is painful in

places and the lead actors are required to play two of the dumbest scientists in the world with the kind of parenting skills that explain why some people just shouldn't have children." Both Vadim and Hunter criticize the human reactions to a scientific mistake, which comprises the main horror elements of the film. Consequently, the critics would seemingly prefer *Splice* to be a science-fiction parable in which scientific concepts outweigh human irrationality. Christopher Tookey, in a positive, four-star review for *The Daily Mail*, argues that "*Splice* isn't just horror or science fiction. It is a film about parenting, portrayed in an ingeniously unfamiliar way as just another form of genetic experimentation." Although Tookey apparently wants to ignore genre distinctions in his review, the critic perceives that *Splice*'s more horrific and scary elements come from the human irrationality that supplies the film with its dramatic core. Tookey, therefore, unwittingly acknowledges the horror elements that underscore *Splice*'s more disturbing scenes.

American critics primarily disagreed over *Splice*'s visual representation of its disturbing psychosexual themes. *USA Today*'s Claudia Puig asserts that "what began as something fresh degenerates into the same slithery, goopy, bloody horror flick we've seen before." Here, Puig criticizes *Splice*'s ending, wherein Dren suddenly undergoes a sex-change, becomes male, and violently rapes Elsa. This conclusion is also lambasted by the *New York Daily News*' Joe Neumaier, who maintains that "the cobbled-together screenplay is silly when it should be spooky, cold when it should boil over and dumb when it should be smart… Natali wanted to do a kind of Canadian-grown *Species*." By referring to Roger Donaldson's psychosexual science-fiction film *Species* (1995), Neumaier reduces *Splice*'s ending to an attempt at reproducing one of Hollywood's past genre-film successes. *Species*, a type of alien-invasion film, and *Splice* have very little in common besides the genetically-altered seductresses at the center of their narratives. Both Puig and Neumaier are offended by *Splice*'s ending, but their collective inability to clearly communicate the reason for its negative effect suggests that the film ultimately defied the critics' expectations in negative ways. In another negative response to the film's shocking peculiarities, *The Washington Post*'s Ann Hornaday argues that "the yuck factor spins off the charts in *Splice*, a thoroughly repulsive science fiction-horror flick." Here, Hornaday suggests that there are no redeeming qualities in *Splice*. Ironically, the repulsive "yuck

factor" that disgusts Hornaday also produced positive responses from American reviewers. Tom Long of *The Detroit News* maintains that *Splice* is a "daring, disturbing and deliciously twisted… jolt of a movie arriving as it does in the midst of the somewhat formulaic summer blockbuster season." In this quotation, Long praises Natali's inventive rewriting of the horror genres codes and conventions to defy the standard blockbuster genre formula. Unlike Puig, Neumaier, and Hornaday, Long observes that *Splice*'s disturbing and disquieting moments positively separate it from other, more formulaic films. *The Los Angeles Times*' critic Michael Ordoña also praised *Splice,* asserting that the film "wins best in show by focusing on one of the weirder relationship triangles in recent memory." The critical disparity between American reviewers of *Splice* predominantly concerns the disturbing nature of the film's story. *Splice*'s subject matter is also a contentious issue that arises in the film's Canadian critical reception.

Canadian reviewers were generally positive about *Splice*, but many of the nation's critics focused upon different aspects of the film. *The Toronto Star*'s Peter Howell concentrates upon *Splice*'s monster movie pedigree, arguing that Natali draws influence from David Cronenberg, David Lynch, and Guillermo del Toro, who is also one of the film's executive producers ("Splice"). Howell also praises Natali's use of special effects in the creation of its monsters, arguing that the film "has weird creatures to spare, and they're amongst the most convincing ever put to film. The eye blithely accepts them as real. The main attraction is too good to say too much about" (*ibid.)*. By positively evaluating *Splice*'s special effects, the critic gestures toward the film's overall success as an installment in horror's monster-movie subgenre. Like Howell, the *CBC*'s Lee Ferguson maintains that "*Splice* offers Canadian audiences something to crow about: a clever, homegrown monster mash-up that keeps morphing before your eyes. Part sci-fi, part gross-out horror with a dash of family drama thrown in for good measure, the movie is a complete hoot in all of its slithery forms." According to Ferguson, *Splice* is a successful revisionist genre film because it maintains a good balance between horror formula and unexpected twists in both its story and theme. The *Montreal Mirror*'s Matthew Hays tersely concurs with Howell and Ferguson when he argues that "*Splice* is a truly creepy film." While Howell, Ferguson, and Hays focus upon the monster-movie attributes of *Splice,* other critics, such as *Exclaim*'s Robert Bell and *Voir*'s Kevin Laforest

predominantly praise the performances of Brody and Polley in the film. Bell discerns that "Polley and Brody bring their damaged characters to life," which is a performance quality that, La Forest argues, "keeps it all viable." Bell and Laforest provide necessary commentary upon *Splice*'s actors and the way in which they keep the film's fantastic elements grounded in a human reality. Despite the lack of attention the two actors receive in *Splice*'s promotional materials, Brody and Polley also lend prestige-film star power to their performances, undoubtedly helping the film achieve its status as a "serious" piece of horror cinema. For *The Globe and Mail*'s Rick Groen, *Splice*'s seriousness is one of the film's negative attributes. Despite the overall positivity of Groen's three-star review, the critic emerges as one of *Splice*'s few Canadian detractors when he argues that the film "is one of those genre films that really wants to show off some smarts, to set itself above the common beast, but that cerebral badge sometimes seems a bit ponderous and, in a realm where the visceral rules, a little counter-productive." For Groen, *Splice*'s concerted effort to reinvigorate certain horror tropes becomes tedious, and often undercuts the horror tenets that supply the foundation of the film. Ultimately, *Splice* met with a warm reception from Canadian reviewers that, unlike many other Anglophone Canadian films, praise the film for its particular Canadian content. Although many critics mention that the film is Canadian, they generally treated *Splice* as a horror film instead of a Canadian film, which betrays the ways in which the film was able to subtly overpower its nationality through its controversial subject matter. This overcoming of nationality reveals the manner in which *Splice* succeeds as a piece of popular entertainment. On the other hand, *Splice*'s international production credits undoubtedly contribute to the lack of dialogue about the Canadian-ness of the project, gesturing toward the uncertainty that occurs when discussing co-productions in nationalistic terms.

Ultimately, by Anglophone Canadian standards, *Splice* was a success at the box office. Despite the film's 3000-screen North American and $26.9 million worldwide box office gross, it was not considered unsuccessful. Since *Splice* earned $2.1 million in domestic ticket sales, Natali was awarded Telefilm's Golden Box Office Award for top-earning English-Language Canadian film of 2010 (Vlessing). Furthermore, the film's welcoming Canadian critical reception earned it four Genie nominations, including Best Picture and

Best Director. Overall, *Splice* represents a successful Canadian horror film because it both tests the boundaries of genre formula while keeping spectatorial pleasure in mind.

2.3 Conclusion

Horror cinema's resurgence in popularity in the twenty-first century undoubtedly affected the production of Canadian genre films. In addition to *Pontypool* and *Splice*¸ Canadian filmmakers produced many other horror films, including the zombie-comedy *Fido* (Andrew Currie 2006), two straight-to-DVD *Ginger Snaps* sequels (Brett Sullivan 2003; Grant Harvey 2004), the serial-killer film *Good Neighbours* (Jacob Tierney 2010), and the Québécois torture-porn *7 Days* (Daniel Grou 2010). Although these films met with mixed critical receptions and uneven ticket and DVD sales upon their respective releases, they certainly gesture toward the Anglophone Canadian film industry's effort to create a popular horror cinema both domestically and internationally.

Pontypool and *Splice* represent different forms of Anglophone Canadian horror cinema and experienced varied receptions and box office receipts upon their release dates. Despite their differences, the two films emblematize the creative efforts of English-speaking Canadian filmmakers to reinvigorate horror cinema for the twenty-first century. Both *Pontypool*'s linguistically-produced zombies and *Splice*'s horrific genetic experiments not only reveal the ingenuity of Anglophone Canada's small-budget filmmakers, but also show that there are distinctively Canadian perspectives underlying the films' genre codes and conventions. Although *Pontypool* failed to become a popular film, *Splice*'s success at the box-office suggests that there is a Canadian audience that wants to see Canada's English-language genre cinema. *Pontypool*'s bilingual satire is also emblematic of a trend in Anglophone Canadian comedy films. The playfulness that McDonald's film exudes when it addresses Canada's French-English tensions is also present in the Anglophone Canadian comedy cinema, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Copping a Laugh: *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*

Two detectives, hailing from disparate cultural and ethnic backgrounds, are called to investigate an unusual crime scene. The specific nature of the crime – whether the crime-scene involves illegal drugs, homicide, or larceny – does not matter very much. The unusual geographic, personal, political, or cultural circumstances of the crime scene are important, however, because they necessitate the co-operation of the detectives, who do not know or like each other due to their shared set of personal, cultural, or social differences. At the beginning of their investigation, the two men bear healthy, yet unnecessary, enmities toward one another and frequently make minor, comical mistakes because of their respective unfriendliness. As the case gradually becomes more taxing, personally-motivated, and dangerous for the officers and their loved ones, the two individuals put aside their differences and become friends. Subsequently, this newfound friendship and co-operation enables the pair of detectives to both solve the crime and neutralize the criminals who perpetrated the wrongdoing, either by killing or incarcerating them.

The above paragraph very generally describes the basic plotline of a typical buddy-cop film, a popular subcategory of Hollywood's action cinema. The buddy cop subgenre is a product of multifaceted genre hybridity that arises out of three different filmmaking traditions: buddy-, action-, and comedy films. Firstly, buddy-films have existed since Laurel and Hardy's cinematic works of the 1930s, featuring "the juxtaposition of two men of differing personalities and backgrounds and their evolving relationship. These differences are accepted over the course of their adventures as both men recognize that together they can face what threatens [them]" (Kimmel and Aronson 141). Significantly, buddy films always exist in conjunction with other genres, predominantly presenting their codes and conventions alongside those of action-adventure, western, and comedy traditions. Contemporary action cinema, on the other hand, relies upon a mixture of western and film noir conventions (Lichtenfeld 2-3). Action films combine the violent, and apparently justified, vigilantism that is commonly attributed to the solitary heroes of

westerns with the rampant subterfuge and distrustful behaviour that is prevalent in noir films, creating a genre in which the typical narrative privileges "not the investigation of… crime, but rather the obliteration of criminals" (4). Action films often present this act of obliterating evildoers in a visually spectacular fashion, privileging cinematic renderings of excessive violence. Finally, comedic cinema is the largest and most unwieldy of the three genres that contribute to buddy-cop film formulas. A very general definition of a comedic film would be "a work that is designed in some way to provoke laughter or humour on the part of the viewer" (King 2). Like buddy films, the genre elements of comedies are "often found as one component of films that fall into other categories," which suggests that humorous filmmaking can be considered both a specific genre and, more generally, a mode of cinematic production that is designed to incite laughter (*ibid.*). Comedic cinema, therefore, is primarily preoccupied with a film's tone and spectatorial address and can be both marginally and totally present in a motion picture. These broad definitions of the conventions of buddy, action, and comedy films not only demonstrate the categorical fluidity of the buddy-cop formula, but also gesture toward the notion that no genre can exist in a pure form. As such, an action film can have comedic sequences, buddy film are commonly both funny and adventurous, and a comedy can feature many scenes of violent action. This inherent genre-based flexibility allows buddy-cop films to alternate between lighthearted and gravely serious subject matter, tranquility and violence, and humorous and frightening scenes. The buddy-cop subgenre's popularity, then, can be ascribed, in part, to a broad variety of tones and genre traditions that the filmmaking category employs.

The basic narrative developments outlined at the beginning of this chapter, as well as the previously-mentioned constituent genre codes and conventions, apply to the most canonical films in the buddy-cop subgenre, such as *48 Hrs.* (Walter Hill 1982), *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner 1987), and *Bad Boys* (Michael Bay 1995). With its implicit condoning of brutal police violence and pat humanism, the buddy-cop subgenre is certainly ideologically problematic. Each of these Hollywood films depicts rule-abiding police officers as hesitant, nervous, and inefficacious while often presenting harmful and violent situations as humorous hijinks that only hurt the wrongdoers and criminals. This implicit condoning of vigilantism undoubtedly gestures toward a worrisome form of

cinematic wish-fulfillment that allows police officers to eschew law and order in favour of violently administering justice. Furthermore, buddy-cop films predominantly divide their lead protagonists along racial, cultural, and socioeconomic lines, but their conclusions often glibly dismiss race and class as arbitrary and ultimately reasonless boundaries that stand between people. The ostensible positivity of the buddy-cop films' endings elides the frequent exclusion or marginalization of women, homosexuals, children, and races other than white or black from this supposedly universal reclaiming of a male detectives self-worth. Despite these ideological problems, the three buddy-cop films listed above and more-recent additions to the subgenre, such as the *Rush Hour* franchise (Brett Ratner 1998; 2001; 2007), were overwhelming commercial successes, revealing the consistent popularity of the buddy-cop formula[19]. Fittingly, the buddy-cop subgenre made an indelible mark upon popular Canadian cinema in 2006. That year, Québécois director Érik Canuel's *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* became a notable Canadian film for three reasons: it is the first Canadian film to explicitly belong to the buddy-cop subgenre, it is the nation's first fully bilingual genre film, and it is the most commercially successful film at the domestic box-office in the history of the country's cinema.

Although *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is not strictly a part of Anglophone Canadian cinema, this chapter will focus on Canuel's film because it is half an English-language Canadian film; it is a bilingual and bicultural project that was financed by Ontarian, Québécois, and federal funding agencies with the aim of drawing the filmgoing audiences of both Francophone and Anglophone Canada. The film also features an equal amount of stars from both Quebec and English-speaking Canada, including comedians Patrick Huard and Rick Mercer, Stratford-bred thespian Colm Feore, and Pierre Lebeau, the star of the popular Quebec film series *Les Boys* (Louis Saïa 1997; 1998; 2001; George Mihalka 2005). Moreover, *Bon Cop* was released in the middle of a slew of twenty-first century

---

[19] *48 Hrs.* was made for $1 million and grossed $78.8 million domestically. *Lethal Weapon* was made on a budget of $15 million and grossed $65.2 million domestically. *Bad Boys* had a $19 million budget and grossed $65.8 million domestically. *Rush Hour*, *Rush Hour 2*, and *Rush Hour 3* were respectively produced with $33 million, $90 million, and $140 million budgets and respectively made $244.3 million, $337.3 million, and $258 million worldwide. While all of these films exemplify the popularity of buddy-cop films, the *Rush Hour* series demonstrates the success of this formula well into the 21st century.

English-language Canadian films that attempted to achieve commercial success at the domestic box office by employing straightforward, high-concept genre formulas to tell their stories. These films include the curling-centered romantic comedy *Men with Brooms* (Paul Gross 2002), the Christopher Guest-inspired[20] comedy series *Fubar* (Michael Dowse 2002; 2010), the caper-comedy *Foolproof* (William Phillips 2003), the zombie-farce *Fido* (Andrew Currie 2006), the television and film neo-Hoser comedy of the *Trailer Park Boys* series (Mike Clattenburg 2001; 2006; 2008), the melodrama-war film *Passchendaele* (Paul Gross 2008), the teen-comedy *The Trotsky* (Jacob Tierney 2009), and the body horror film *Splice* (Vincenzo Natali 2010). This list of films includes both commercial successes and failures[21], and undoubtedly indicates Anglophone-Canadian cinema's increasing tendency to create prospective blockbusters that channel Hollywood's streamlined and ever-successful brand of cinematic entertainment.

The English-language Canadian movies listed above come from a wide variety of genres, but a vast majority of the films are either comedies or hybrid-comedies. This apparent faith in the commercial appeal of comedic filmmaking is not a new trend in Anglophone Canadian cinema. During the late-1970s and early-1980s, Canada's English-speaking filmmakers released financially successful comedies like *Meatballs* (Ivan Reitman 1979), *Strange Brew* (Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas 1983), and *Porky's* (Bob Clark 1982). The latter of these films was the most commercially successful Canadian motion picture at the domestic box office until 2006, when *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* surmounted its longstanding record (Zacharias 1). It is not surprising that comedic filmmaking has seen a

---

[20] Guest's *Waiting for Guffman* (1996), *Best in Show* (2002), and *A Mighty Wind* (2003), among other films (such as the Guest-penned and Reiner-directed 1984 rock star spoof *This is Spinal Tap*), are absurdist, participatory talking-head mockumentaries that undoubtedly inspired Dowse's humour and aesthetic in *Fubar*.

[21] *Men with Brooms* had a budget of $7.5 million and grossed $4.2 million domestically. *Fubar* and its sequel, *Fubar: Balls to the Wall* were respectively made with $500,000 and $3.5 million budgets; the former grossed $500,000 and the latter grossed $555,000 domestically. *Foolproof* had a budget of $7 million and grossed $460,000 domestically. *Fido* was made for $11 million and grossed $304,000 domestically. *Trailer Park Boys: The Movie* was made for $5 million and grossed $3.8 million worldwide. Its sequel, *Trailer Park Boys: Countdown to Liquor Day*, was made for $3.5 million and grossed $2.9 million domestically. *Passchendaele* was made for $20 million and grossed $4.43 million domestically. *The Trotsky* was made for $6.4 million and grossed $440,000 domestically. *Splice* was made for $30 million and grossed $26.9 million worldwide.

resurgence in Canada's recent output of popular cinema, given the historical success of comedy filmmaking in the late-twentieth century, as well as the ongoing popularity of television comedies like *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* (Mary Walsh 1992), *Corner Gas* (Brent Butt 2004), and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (Zarqa Nawaz 2007). *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is both a representative and an outlier of this current trend in popular Anglophone Canadian cinema. This duality exists because, despite *Bon Cop*'s typically formulaic buddy-cop narrative and flashy aesthetic style, the film is both completely bilingual and occupies the highest position of commercial success within the entirety of Canada cinematic history. Although Québec's film industry continues to produce and release commercially successful popular genre films like the *Les Boys* series, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* demonstrates how formulaic comedic filmmaking is also a viable model for popular cinematic production in Anglophone Canada (Hays 22). Simultaneously, the film's bilingual mode of national spectatorial address makes the film a unique addition to its cohort of Canadian genre films. The film is both a Canadian success story and a complex example of Anglophone Canadian cinema's creation of a popular film.

3.1 "Shoot First, Translate Later"

Bon Cop, Bad Cop also stands alone in Anglophone Canada's cinematic tradition as a successful bilingual genre film. Unlike other Canadian bilingual films like Larry Kent's *Fleur Bleue* (1971) and Kevin Tierney's post-*Bon Cop* comedy, *French Immersion* (2011), Canuel's film is a commercial and popular success ("Box Office"; Hays "Two Solitudes" 21). This unparalleled success is due to *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s clever ability to blend its bilingual themes with the Hollywood buddy-cop genre formula. Consequently, the film allows Canada's bicultural divisions to play out within the realm of a formulaic action-comedy. *Bon Cop* is a bilingual film that communicates using one of Canada's uniting and universal languages: the semantic and syntactic grammar of Hollywood genre formula. By using the tropes and traditions of buddy cop action comedy films in *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, Canuel negotiates and, within the film's action, largely overcomes the bicultural and bilingual divide within Canada's borders. *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s appropriation of the generic codes and conventions of the buddy cop films to represent the cross-cultural dialogue of Québec and Anglophone Canada relates to Ulf Hedetoft's

argument that non-Hollywood genre films use "taken-for-granted assumptions and common-sense… [that] are of a US origin no matter how strongly they might parade as global [or non-American nationalistic] plots, themes or ideas" (281). Despite that, in this quotation, Hedetoft apparently illustrates how non-Hollywood genre films are inherently indebted to this dominant filmmaking industry, the scholar also gestures toward the manner in which these non-American genre cinemas change and adapt learned cinematic formulas, codes, and conventions to create their own versions of particular types of films. Accordingly, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is a uniquely potent example of Anglophone Canadian cinema's process of indigenizing the genre cinema conventions laid out by Hollywood. Before this can be explored further, however, it is necessary to briefly outline the plot of Canuel's film.

Bon Cop, Bad Cop tells the story of two detectives, Martin Ward (Colm Feore) and David Bouchard (Patrick Huard), who respectively work at Toronto and Montreal police departments. The two police officers originally meet when a deceased man's body is found balanced evenly upon an Ontario-Québec border marker. Subsequently, Ward and Bouchard are forced to solve the mysterious crime together because their commanders believe it would generate good publicity for each of their Ontarian and Québécois law-enforcement agencies. The two detectives begin their investigation in Montreal and, despite their shared ability to speak both English and French, they do not work well together due to personal and cultural differences between the uptight, fastidious Ward and the rebellious, unkempt Bouchard. As Ward and Bouchard descend further into a conspiracy that involves a crazed hockey fan murdering the high-ranking executives of a professional hockey league, the two men develop a friendship that transforms their physical and intellectual weaknesses into strengths. When the murderer moves his killing spree from Montreal to Toronto, the pair of detectives follows him, unwittingly leaving their families vulnerable to the psychopath's vengeful schemes. The murderer manages to capture Bouchard's daughter, but, finally, the two officers defeat their assailant by kidnapping the commissioner of the professional hockey league and using the executive as bait. Finally, the murderer dies in an explosion caused by his own bomb, which enables Ward and Bouchard to save the latter's daughter and effectively close the case that initially brought them together. This summary demonstrates how closely the

superficial narrative of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s adheres to the codes and conventions of the buddy-cop subgenre, but this compliance with genre formula does not simplify the film as a piece of popular cinema. Instead, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s subject matter actively complicates and problematizes the genre codes and conventions present in the film.

The tenets of Hollywood's buddy cop action-comedy films are transformed and warped in *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*. Although Canuel's film aesthetically and narratively resembles *Lethal Weapon* and *Rush Hour*, its narrative is coated in a gently ironic reflexivity. Whereas the two aforementioned Hollywood films feature their two mismatched protagonists eventually becoming kindred spirits in their fight against evildoers, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s characters continue to bicker and squabble during their seemingly cooperative moments, undercutting the utopic concluding representation of cross-cultural utopia that the genre often demands. Furthermore, the crimes that the two protagonists commit to save Bouchard's daughter contain sinister overtones that question the supposedly just actions of the police officers. *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* also neglects to provide an ending scene in which the detectives are reunited with their families and fellow officers. By concluding the film with the death of the film's villain on a Toronto tourist boat, Canuel tacitly and invisibly uses spectatorial assumptions about the genre's formula to complete the narrative's ending. These plot details comprise only a few examples of the reflexive and subversive revisions to Hollywood's buddy cop genre formula present in *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*. Consequently, Canuel adapts the genre's codes and conventions to Canada's divided bilingual national culture in order to communicate national tensions and discomforts within a universal cinematic language. Instead of using genre formula to fictionally ameliorate cultural divisions and tensions, Canuel uses the familiar representative practices to bring Canada's bicultural tensions to the thematic forefront and wallow in their trenchancy. The subversiveness and reflexivity of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* do not undercut the film's intrinsic entertainment value, however, and its adherence to the buddy cop genre's traditions ultimately make it an effective example of populist Canadian cinematic entertainment.

Bon Cop, Bad Cop's buddy-cop formula and bilingual-bicultural subject matter undoubtedly positions it as a populist film for both Anglophone and Francophone

Canada, but Canuel's employment of both genre-based and sociocultural codes is sometimes troubling. Patricia Bailey argues that "there is also a strain of redneck machismo permeating Quebec popular culture, particularly in the increasingly popular comedy industry" (A15). Here, Bailey suggests that Canuel's film presents a male-dominated, white-oriented version of both English- and French-speaking Canada. This version of "redneck machismo" reveals that, despite *Bon Cop*'s evident wit and good humour when skewering Canada's cultural and linguistic bifurcation, the film, like most comedic buddy films, largely marginalizes women, excludes non-white races, and omits LGBT subjects from its diegesis. The film is set in both Montreal and Toronto, which are incredibly multicultural urban spaces, and, somehow, there is no visible racial or ethnic difference throughout the narrative's duration. *Bon Cop* is not prescriptively trying to present a Paul Gross-esque ideal for Canadian cities and behaviour, but the film`s overt nationalism and near-complete elision of non-male, non-white, and non-heteronormative aspects of Canada`s sociocultural environment certainly raises questions about what version of the country the film might be trying to represent and whether the film's obvious high-concept, formulaic populism excuses or amplifies its problematic representative strategies. The press that accompanied *Bon Cop*'s funding and promotional announcements differed starkly from the overt marketing strategies that accompanied Paul Gross' *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele*, which attempted to inculcate Canadian pride and construct "real" depictions of English-speaking Canada. Canuel's film is mainly touted as a populist and fun pan-Canadian schlock-fest that, while not being without its problems, seeks to entertain Canada's masses, rather than speak to their nationalist ideals. The emphasis upon genre also emerges out of the film's production history.

Bon Cop, Bad Cop had an $8 million production budget, with a majority of the funding coming from Telefilm, Québec's *Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles* (SODEC), and the Ontario Media Development Corporation (Kelly "*Bon Cop*" 1). Montreal producer Kevin Tierney's Park-Ex Pictures also contributed $150,000 to the project (Zacharias 1). Tierney mainly directs his enthusiasm for the film toward its bilingual dialogue and bicultural subject matter, but the producer also explicitly reveals the high-concept appeal of the film when he argues that "it's just adolescent enough. We

have a little sex, a little drugs and a little rock 'n' roll. We blow a lot of shit up and most Canadian movies don't do that" (qtd. in Zacharias 1). Tierney's proud extolling of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s juvenile action-film attributes indicates the reasons for the film's larger-than-usual production budget: the film exists as a piece of pure blockbuster entertainment. Excepting Tierney's comments about the uniquely bilingual script of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, the producer addresses neither the film's intelligence nor its ingenuity, which illustrates that its primary goal is to provide comfortable, pleasing entertainment. The overt pan-Canadian populism of the script, however, did not stop Alliance's promotion and marketing budget for the film from being distributed in a strangely uneven manner. Alliance spent $1.3 million promoting *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* in Québec, which is the exact same amount that was spent on marketing the film in English-speaking Canada (Kelly "*Bon Cop*" 1). Although Canuel's film is considered a success in both Anglophone and Francophone Canada, Alliance's uneven promotional funding distribution was undoubtedly pernicious to the motion picture's domestic box office performance outside of Québec. These unequal marketing strategies will also be elucidated by an analysis of the film's promotional materials.

Bon Cop, Bad Cop was primarily advertised through two promotional pieces of media, a poster and a website. Both promotional materials emphasized the film's action-movie attributes and its Canadian subject matter. Since *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is bilingual, the film's Anglophone-Canadian and Québécois posters are remarkably similar. The poster cleverly condenses most of the film's genre conventions and plot-devices into its imagery. Feore and Huard are featured in the foreground, wearing the costumes that they don throughout most of the film. The costumes effectively outline the differences between the two characters. Huard's leather jacket, faded rock t-shirt, and sunglasses accurately portray Bouchard's reckless, undaunted personality. Furthermore, Huard is wearing his badge around his neck, which is reminiscent of the edgy and unhinged undercover police officers of well-known crime films, such as *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino 1992) and *Serpico* (Sidney Lumet 1973). Feore, on the other hand, is wearing a white dress-shirt, striped-tie, and pinstriped suit jacket, which illustrates Ward's more well-groomed, rule-abiding demeanour as a police officer. Feore also wears his badge, but, unlike Huard, it is neatly secured to his belt. Significantly, both Huard and Feore are

wearing denim jeans, subtly indicating the shared bond that forms between Ward and Boucher as the film progresses. This foregrounding of Feore and Huard also highlights the two actors as recognizable Canadian stars. Huard, mostly from his leading role in the *Les Boys* series of films, is a French-Canadian star and Feore has a resume that boasts countless popular and artistic international[22] television and film roles. Clearly, the two *Bon Cop* actors are recognizable and likable Canadian celebrities. Furthermore, the costuming and characterization presented in the poster relates to Huard's and Feore's star personas as, respectively, a popular, good-looking rebel and a middle-aged, well-respected veteran.

While the character traits of Ward and Boucher are foregrounded through the poster's costuming, the advertisement also emphasizes the film's action-movie attributes. On the left side of the poster's background, an exploding car is suspended in midair while engulfed in flames. This incendiary image not only showcases one of the most expensive one-time shots in *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, but also gestures toward the film's intense action sequences and spectacular violence (Walker E2). The poster also depicts Ward and Boucher nonchalantly walking away from the explosion, gesturing toward their ability to remain relaxed while they endure the persistent threat of physical violence. Furthermore, the grim spectre of the villain's masked face is superimposed above the explosion, visually linking the wrongdoer with an extreme act of violence. The threat of violence and death is corroborated by the film's tagline, "Shoot First, Translate Later," which appears just above the title in the middle of the poster. The pithy tagline hints at the detectives' reckless behaviour and rapid-fire bilingual banter throughout *Bon Cop*, illustrating both the film's bilingual subject matter and its action-packed genre conventions. Additionally, smoke is visible in the bottom half of the poster, stretching from the exploding car in the background to the detectives' pants in the foreground. The

---

[22] Throughout his career, Feore worked in a variety of Canadian and international films, making him a recognizable leading actor both within and without Canada. He has acted in prestigious American films such as Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) and Michael Mann's *The Insider* (1999), as well as prominent television serials like *Law and Order* (Dick Wolf 1990-2010) and *24* (Robert Cochran 2001-2010). Feore has continued his successful acting career both inside and outside Canada since *Bon Cop*, performing in the respectively Canadian and American *The Trotsky* (Jacob Tierney 2009) and *Thor* (Kenneth Branagh 2011).

smoke undoubtedly underlines the serious nature of the exploding automobile, but its yellowish tint and hazy wafts also hearken back to a scene in which Ward and Boucher destroy a marijuana grow-op by setting it on fire and subsequently becoming intoxicated from smoke inhalation. This drug reference also demonstrates the comedic, buddy-movie aspect of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, adding some levity to the overall seriousness of the poster's action-film codes and conventions.

Alongside these character and genre profiles, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s poster includes some overt references to its Canadian content. Underneath the banner of the title in the poster's center foreground, there is a logo that is half a maple leaf and half a *fleur-de-lys*. This bipartite national symbol signifies the two cultures that are on display in *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* while, simultaneously, inviting filmgoing audiences to watch, recognize, and enjoy the film's send-ups of Canadiana. The film's satirical representations include a homicidal beaver hockey mascot, collective misunderstandings of Québec's working-class *joual* slang, Rick Mercer's impersonation of loudmouth hockey commentator Don Cherry, and the contrasting depictions of Montreal as a predominantly working-class, run-down urban centre and Toronto as an ostentatious mecca of corporate excess. The bifurcated leaf-*fleur* symbol also presents Canada as a nation that is divided by linguistic, cultural, and social differences and, interestingly, suggests that this disparity in the country's national culture will not become a utopic, unified whole. Indeed, Canada's bicultural divisions remain consistent throughout the film, with its two-part story that is evenly split between Montreal and Toronto, its Québécois and English-speaking characters' persistent hatred toward each other, and its frequent representations of misunderstandings between Anglophones and Francophones. Additionally, the superimposed image of *Bon Cop Bad Cop*'s villain features him wearing a hockey-goalie mask, which is an obvious indicator of Canada's national pastime. This goalie mask that adorns the film's villain is not a positive signifier of national pride, however, because the face-covering is associated with a murderer. Consequently, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* perverts this stereotypical image of Canadians as hockey fanatics, transforming that fanaticism into a corrupting force that

causes death[23]. The poster's emblematic depiction of Canada's national culture interpellates Canada's viewers to recognize *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s referential relationship with Canadian culture and, simultaneously, highlights the more critical aspects of Canuel's send-up of the country's divided society. This bipolarity within the poster is an example of the manner in which the film applies the buddy cop genre's codes and conventions to Canadian culture. Although generic formulas are undoubtedly on display, they are somewhat ironized and rendered uncanny by their presence within such stereotypically Canadian imagery and subject matter. By addressing Canadian themes that are as disparate as hockey fanaticism and national bicultural divisions through recognizable genre elements, such as two warring detectives and the imminent threat of violent action, the poster reveals how the film indigenizes Hollywood-defined tropes and traditions to create a type of Canadian popular entertainment. This significant filtering of *Bon Cop*'s "Canadian" mode of address through genre codes and conventions is also an important aspect of the film's trailer.

The Anglophone-Canadian trailer for *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* predominantly foregrounds the film's buddy-cop film conventions, as well as its bilingual and bicultural mode of representation. The trailer begins with the threatening image of the film's murderer killing his first victim, but it subsequently adopts a more comedic tone. The trailer has a prominent voice-over commentator who argues that "for detective Martin Ward, solving his latest case is nothing compared to getting along with his new partner." Shortly after this assertion, Ward derisively tells another English-speaking police officer that Boucher is "from Québec." This disparaging moment of bicultural division begins a frenetic montage that features numerous scenes of Ward and Boucher bickering, countless references to professional hockey, and many sequences of comical slapstick violence, including a man getting shoved aggressively into a trunk by the detectives, police officers firing guns at seemingly random targets, many explosions, and some car chases. The

---

[23] In the same way that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* appropriates the buddy-cop genre film, this goalie mask could be a reference to the *Friday the 13th* series, which features Jason Voorhees, a serial killer whose signature costuming attribute is a face-covering goalie mask. The analogue between Voorhees and *Bon Cop*'s serial killer gestures toward another adaptation of American iconography within the film.

trailer underscores *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s action-film conventions by using very fast editing techniques, thereby creating a disorienting mash-up of violence and mayhem. The trailer has a consistently lighthearted tone, however, and often interrupts or couples its violent scenes with comedic, antagonist, and bilingual exchanges between Boucher and Ward. These exchanges not only foreground the importance of bilingualism as a source of humour in the film, but also highlight the adversarial chemistry between Huard and Feore. As a result, the trailer effectively promotes *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s buddy-cop formula by maintaining an unfailingly jovial mood that overrides any gravity that may be present in the film's violent scenes.

While the trailer's voiceover narration and juxtaposed pieces of dialogue certainly foreground *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s buddy-cop genre conventions, both the monologue and dialogue fragments contain important implications about the film's bilingual and bicultural content. After the aforementioned incipient argument, the narrator discerns that "their cultures don't match, their styles don't blend, and when the case becomes personal, opposites attack. Now, they're walking the walk and talking the talk." Here, the first narrational sentence perfectly summarizes the genre formula for a buddy-cop film, but the second sentence references the bilingual and bicultural aspects of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*. By arguing that Ward and Boucher learn to "walk the walk" and "talk the talk," the commentator is suggesting that the characters adapt to each other's cultures rather than simply dismiss the differences between them. The additional dialogue that is inserted underneath the voiceover narration also illustrates the differences between the two detectives. These snippets of dialogue include Ward arguing that "I don't know if you don't respect the rules just because you're ignorant, or just because you're a lunatic, or just because you're French" while Boucher gleefully punches a reluctant witness and the latter's rejoinder, "on-chont-eh [*enchanté*], hey, we got somebody who can *spick* de French." Significantly, the trailer never shows the two detectives getting along. Although Ward and Boucher eventually become friends in the film, the trailer's reluctance to show any friendliness between the two detectives suggests that a cinematic send-up of Canada's often antagonistic bicultural divide is more attractive to Canadian viewers than simply abiding by the buddy-cop genre formula. There are many genre-based aspects of the trailer's promotional strategy, but the bilingual and bicultural tensions of *Bon Cop,*

Bad Cop are also starkly prevalent and, because of their humour, undeniably attractive. This bipartite promotion of the bilingual and bicultural tensions and genre formula in *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s advertising materials informed the film's Anglophone-Canadian critical reception.

3.2 Bon Critics, Bad Critics

Bon Cop, Bad Cop's critical reception in Anglophone Canada[24] was mostly positive, but reviewers differed greatly in their evaluations of the film's employment of genre formulas, as well as its bilingual and bicultural representations. Positive reviewers enjoyed the film's self-referential treatment of the buddy-cop subgenre. The *National Post*'s Vanessa Farquharson fittingly argues that ""Eric Canuel obviously has a grasp on the tenuous line between irony and farce and treads it assuredly, offering the audiences the winks, nudges and jabs to the ribs most action-comedies skip… are there stereotypes and predictable set-ups in the film? Sure, but remember the title, the genre and what the movie aims to be" (PM3). Here, Farquharson suggests that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s predictability can be attributed to its self-aware adherence to genre codes and conventions, and thereby makes the film an enjoyable and comfortably humorous viewing experience. Scenes that involve a professional hockey league commissioner named Harry Buttman (a juvenile play on the NHL commissioner Gary Bettman), an unsubtle impersonation of Don Cherry's bigotry and strident opinions about hockey, and a homicidal beaver mascot constitute only a few examples of the film's rampant genre- and nationality-based self-awareness. Like Farquharson, Montreal critic Matthew Hays argues that the film "is unapologetic *kétaine*, a Québécois word that loosely translates as kitsch… ultimately, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is perhaps best likened to a big chunk of pure, unrefined *fromage* – it could potentially be fun if you just make sure not to take any of it

---

[24] Surprisingly, there are very few non-Canadian reviews of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*. The film was featured in a few write-ups for industry newspapers like *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*, but neither publication printed an original review. Instead, they reprinted Brendan Kelly's review from Montreal's *The Gazette*. This lack of international critical reception suggests that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s bilingual humour and rote storyline did not translate well in foreign markets, but it also conversely shows the overwhelming success of the film at the domestic box office.

very seriously" (20). Both Hays and Farquharson assert that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s self-aware and kitschy treatment of both the buddy cop genre and Canada's bicultural problems is not meant to be taken seriously, demonstrating that the film can best be understood in relation to its playful tone.

The reviews of both *The Province*'s Glen Schaefer and the *Times-Colonist*'s Michael Reid can be summarized by the latter's argument that the film's playfulness "unabashedly clones the like of *48 Hours* and *Lethal Weapon*, albeit with a distinctly Canuck twist" (B4; B4). Reid and Schaefer's avowal that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* Canadianizes the formulas of canonical Hollywood buddy-cop films is deepened by *The Gazette*'s Brendan Kelly when he argues that the film is indebted to "Hollywood in general and the well-worn buddy-cop action-comedy formula in particular... the whole bilingual thing works surprisingly well, just as it does in real life. English and French people speak in their respective languages, and most everyone does their best to make a go of it in their second language" ("Language Cops" D1). Here, Kelly argues that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s playful treatment of Canada's two official languages during its employment of conventional buddy-cop bickering allows the film to accurately depict real-life linguistic and cultural divisions between Anglophone Canadians and Québécois. Despite the overt buddy-cop genre codes and conventions in *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s narrative, Kelly's argument that the film realistically depicts commonplace strife between Anglophone-Canadians and Québécois subtly indicates the precision of the script's bilingual satire. These positive assessments of the film's humorous representation of bicultural divisions in Canada suggest that the film's comedic elements are more successful than its more violent, action-movie components.

Critics were also positive about *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s star performances. Farquharson argues that "Feore is expectedly excellent as the conservative dork… And Huard is fantastic as the rebellious tough guy with bullet scars on his pecks" (PM3). Kelly also praises Feore and Huard separately, maintaining that "the revelation here is Feore… his sly, under-stated humour is the perfect foil for Huard's more physical style of comedy" ("Language Cops" D1). By arguing that Feore is the perfect foil for Huard, Kelly suggests that the chemistry between the two male actors allows the film's humour to be

communicated from the screen to the audience. Similarly, *The Vancouver Sun*'s Jay Stone asserts that "the odd-couple chemistry between Feore and Huard is funny and uniquely homegrown," suggesting that the stars' performances and chemistry would have been difficult to achieve with Hollywood actors (H3). These positive critical reactions to *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s lead performances suggest that Huard and Feore significantly augment the humorous effect of the film's comedic cinematic deployment of Canadian stereotypes. Despite *Bon Cop*'s overt reliance upon the buddy-cop subgenre's codes and conventions, the two Canadian stars enliven the formulaic script by inserting personality into characters that would ordinarily be considered typecast roles.

Whereas positive reviews complimented *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* for its use of genre, language, and likable star performances, the film's detractors predominantly focused on its formulaic narrative and uneven tone. In a mixed review, the *Ottawa Citizen*'s Brigitte Pellerin argues that the film "is a tad ordinaire with more than a few improbable bits… and the occasional tendency to substitute slapstick for clever writing… the storyline relied a bit too much on the apparently bottomless subject of Quebecers feeling badly done to by evil pompous English-speaking morons" (A14). Here, Pellerin criticizes *Bon Cop* for its repeated assumption that simply mentioning broadly stereotypical Canadianisms can invigorate the most formulaic and predictable moments of its script. *Toronto Life* magazine's Paul Matthews augments Pellerin's arguments when he discerns that the film's "action plot is a soggy, meagre thing," subsequently maintaining that Canuel's work is "castrated by its desire to appeal as broadly as possible." √ Both Pellerin and Matthews suggest that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s satire of Canadian biculturalism and bilingualism does not amend its formulaic plot and melodramatic ending. Matthews also argues that the film's overriding populism ultimately undercuts its satirical deconstructions of Canadian culture. The *Toronto Star*'s Peter Howell similarly asserts that there is "so much talent on display, it's a pity that the threadbare story too often relies on explosions, chases and strained coincidences" (D6). Like Pellerin and Matthews, Howell finds *Bon Cop*'s action-film attributes tedious, but differs from the former critics by lightly praising the film's thorough send-up of Canadian subject matter (D6). Another *Ottawa Citizen* critic, Patricia Bailey, was much more negative than the three

aforementioned reviewers. Bailey argues that "I came away feeling I had just watched a banal, violent American action film. And as an Anglo-Canadian who has been living here and writing about this [Canadian] culture for years, I found its tired stereotypes about English Canada and Quebec embarrassing" (A14). Here, Bailey criticizes the same formulaic genre tropes and representations of Canadian stereotypes that Pellerin, Matthews, and Howell lament. Bailey's embarrassment, however, seems to arise from the film's negative "American" attitude toward Canada's bicultural society. Ironically, it is precisely this negative attribute of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* that makes the film an effective Canadian genre film. *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* uses the narrative and aesthetic formula that it borrows from Hollywood to present a linguistic satire that humorously points out flaws and fractures in Canada's bicultural social environments. The film does not, however, offer solutions to any of the societal problems that it invokes. For Bailey, Canuel's destructive criticisms are unfunny and embarrassing, but the critic misses how these negative elements reflect the way in which the film defies the largely recuperative elements of the buddy cop film. Although most of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s negative reviews address the film's formulaic plot and reliance upon Canadian stereotypes, it is these attributes that make Canuel a somewhat subversive blockbuster director. As discussed in the previously mentioned kidnapping and ending scenes of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop,* Canuel frequently interrupts the buddy cop genre's formulas by inserting disruptive linguistic or representational moments into the seemingly familiar narrative. Ultimately, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s detractors gesture toward the anxieties that many of Canada's critics share surrounding the "Canadian-ness" of Anglophone Canadian popular cinema, especially when overt and unapologetic genre films, which seem to privilege the influence of Hollywood more than Canada's own film industry, are released into domestic theatres. This anxiety also emerges in editorials that were published in major newspapers soon after *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* was theatrically released.

In addition to the professional reviews that accompanied *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s theatrical release, a significant amount of editorials appeared in Canadian publications that discussed the general public's concerns about the film. In the *Sudbury Star*, Tina Siegel argues that "personally, I'm taking *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* as a chance to prove… [that] Canadian cinema is more than angst-ridden drama and poor production values, and most

people agree once they've seen enough of it" (C2). Siegel's argument that *Bon Cop* is an example of Canada's lesser-known popular cinema indicates the film's success as a piece of populist, blockbuster entertainment. Although Siegel problematically divides Canada's art-house and popular cinemas, she ultimately reveals that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s formulaic, yet fun narrative achieves its goal as a work of cinematic entertainment. In an anonymous *Toronto Star* editorial, a writer makes the similar argument that Canadian filmmakers should "just have some fun… and just make good movies like *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*. There is room in our industry for both Canadian films and for the same pure entertainment that Hollywood provides" (A21). Both the anonymous writer and Siegel indicate that English-speaking Canadian audiences recognized *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* as a distinctly Canadian film that uses a Hollywood-based cinematic idiom to tell its story, revealing that domestic audiences responded to and understood *Bon Cop* as a piece of Canadian cinematic entertainment. Furthermore, Siegel and the other author demonstrate how isolationist modes of filmmaking can create alienating and polarizing types of cinema, which certainly exist within Canada's art-house tradition. Unlike the two previous writers, another unnamed author wrote an editorial in the *Vancouver Sun* decrying the film's Hollywood-like attributes. The writer asserts that "it would be healthy and encouraging if this unpretentious picture can stimulate other filmmakers to deal with the national duality in interesting ways of their own" (A10). Here, the writer suggests that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* would be greatly improved if it addressed Canadian social issues in a Canadian manner, without relying upon high-concept narrative techniques. Although *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* certainly manages to look at the buddy-cop film's genre codes and conventions through a Canadian lens, the writer makes the necessary argument that Canadian genre films should work to create their own version of popular cinema, instead of using the grammar of Hollywood cinema, the dominant English-language filmmaking industry. These editorial arguments illustrate *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s polarizing use of genre traditions and Canadian stereotypes. Whether the writers are positive or negative about Canuel's film, they prove one thing: *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* managed to simply generate a response from Canadian filmgoers. For a Canadian film, the amount of attention that *Bon Cop* received from Canada's audiences was unprecedented.

3.3 Conclusion

By the end of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s theatrical run, the film was the most commercially successful Canadian film of all time. Canuel's film ultimately earned $13 million at the domestic box office, making an unprecedented $5 million profit from its ticket receipts (Stone B7). Significantly, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s French version earned $10.6 million and its English version earned $2.4 million, demonstrating that the film was more successful in Québec than it was in the rest of Canada. Despite the stark disparity between the box office grosses in Québec and Anglophone Canada, *Bon Cop* is still considered a resounding success with English-speaking Canadian audiences. The film won the 2006 Golden Reel Award for most commercially successful film of the year and the Genie award for Best Picture (Hays 20; Stone B7). Additionally, Kevin Tierney argues that *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s bilingualism produced some strange, yet true statistics. At the time of the film's release Tierney asserted that "the number one box office attraction in Quebec is in English… [and] in Montreal, the English version drew fuller theatres than the French" (qtd. in Whyte C21). Although *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*'s domestic box office performance raises questions about the viability of popular cinema in Anglophone-Canada and why Canadian film do not fare well in English-Canadian theatres, the success of the film is undeniable and suggests that the establishment of an Anglophone-Canadian popular cinema is indeed possible. Consequently, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is a truly unique Anglophone Canadian film that exists in a liminal state between languages and between cultures. The overwhelming commercial success of Canuel's film, as well as its generally positive critical reception, indicates that using an indigenized form of high-concept Hollywood-style genre cinema is a viable mode of popular filmmaking in Anglophone Canada. Undoubtedly, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is a positive story in Anglophone Canada's struggle to establish a popular cinema that set a precedent for future films like *Splice* and *Hobo with a Shotgun*.

Conclusion

Toward Both a Home and the Holy Grail

In the introduction to this study of English-language Canadian cinema, I quote John Frow's argument that "the category of popular culture has a unitary form… only as long as it is derived from a singular entity, 'the people'; otherwise it breaks down into a bundle of very heterogeneous forms and practices" (82). Frow's suggestion that popular culture is fractured, fragmented, and situated on "contested ground" is no more apt than when it is applied to English-language Canadian cinema (73). Anglophone Canada's cinema is multifaceted and often contradictory. Canadian arthouse auteurs are the country's most famous and, often, most commercially successful filmmakers. The nation's film industry's attempts to create English-language motion pictures that are lucrative at the domestic box office are frequently lambasted by critics and avoided by audiences due to their apparently banal and uninspired rehashing of Hollywood-style filmmaking. The most popular English-language Canadian films in the twenty-first century earned most of their money outside of Anglophone Canada. Indeed, these facts make the very notion of a popular cinematic culture in English-speaking Canada problematic, confusing, and contestable. The complexity of establishing a popular cinema in Anglophone Canada does not, however, preclude the possibility of achieving this goal.

One of the main goals of this study was to choose individual cinematic examples of English-speaking Canada's attempts to create a popular cinema and situate those examples within a larger historical and contemporary context in the nation's filmmaking industry and culture. Although *Men with Brooms*, *Passchendaele*, *Splice*, and *Pontypool* all failed to recoup their production and marketing costs, they undeniably represent some successes. *Men with Brooms* and *Passchendaele* earned about $4 million each at Anglophone Canadian theatres, which is a very high gross for a Canadian film. Furthermore, the films highlight Paul Gross as a certifiable English-Canadian star who, despite his problematic representational strategies and questionable desire to

cinematically portray an ideal Canada, is recognizable and bankable at domestic box offices. Unfortunately, a star's fame and bankability does not guarantee a film's financial success, which was evident when Paul Gross starred in William Phillips' 2010 western-comedy, *Gunless*, which grossed only $250,000 at the domestic box office, falling well below recouping its $10 million production and marketing cost (Strauss). *Splice*, alternatively, earned more money than any other English-language Canadian film in 2010 by collecting $2.1 million domestically. Significantly, the film also accrued over $25 million at international theatres, which problematizes the notion that Canadian motion pictures can become popular solely within Anglophone Canada. Additionally, despite its status as the highest-earning Canadian film in history, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* earned approximately 90% of its box-office revenue in Québec (B3). This surprising inequity does not acknowledge that Alliance supplied the film's Québécois promotional campaign with more funding than it supplied to campaigns in the rest of Canada's provinces combined, but the marked disparity between *Bon Cop*'s Francophone and Anglophone Canadian box office performances is an undeniable indicator of English-language Canada's troubles with establishing a popular cinema within its borders. Although the films included in the preceding case studies do not represent an exhaustive catalogue of Anglophone Canada's efforts to create a popular cinema in the first decade of the twenty-first century, they do provide examples of some of the most commercially successful films to emerge from the industry's contemporary cinematic endeavours.

Furthermore, *Men with Brooms*, *Passchendaele*, *Splice*, *Pontypool*, and *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* are all types of genre films that, to varying degrees, revise and reinterpret the established codes and conventions of the particular genres to which they belong. *Men with Brooms* and *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* both adapt high-concept comedic filmmaking tropes and aesthetics to address and satirize Canadian cultural and social issues. While *Men* and *Bon Cop* are both problematic due to their respective filtering of Canadiana through the overly simplifying lens of Hollywood-style comedy, the two films effectively observe and skewer Canadian stereotypes, which undoubtedly contributed to the films' respective box office successes. *Splice* and *Pontypool* are two distinctly different Anglophone Canadian horror films. Significantly, both *Splice*, with its updating of Cronenbergian aesthetics and psychosexual themes, and *Pontypool*, with its diseased bilingual zombie

threat, are effective additions to Canada's English-language cinematic tradition. The differences in box office performance between Natali's and McDonald's films can be partly attributed to the former's straight-faced use of familiarly Canadian horror tropes. Natali's transformation of recognizably Cronenbergian themes into easily digestible pop-horror cinema cleverly culled fans of both auteur horror cinemas and blockbuster cinemas in a way that McDonald's quirky farce was unable to do. *Passchendaele*, on the other hand, achieved its relative box office success by borrowing and Canadianizing motifs and aesthetics from Hollywood's late-twentieth century war films, especially *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg 1998). Many of *Passchendaele*'s themes, such as honour, the loss of innocence, and the building of a nation, are communicated in the Manichean manner that befits the nationalism and two-sided representative strategies of a war film. Additionally, the film's melodramatic representations of the Calgarian home-front during WWI use the genre to represent Canada as a small and innocent nation that became a world power through hardship. In *Passchendaele*, the flagrant aggrandizement of relatively minor acts of courage and heartbreak is apropos of the two aforementioned genre traditions that it uncritically employs. These case studies also addressed the importance of various genres to English-speaking Canada's film history, establishing precedents for the commercial success or failure of the five listed films. Genre plays an important role in English-language Canadian filmmaking, and it cannot go unmentioned in a study of the country's popular cinema.

While theatrical revenue provides a lot of important information about the financial performance of a film, it does not tell the whole story of a film's potential lucrativeness. Many English-language Canadian films have become profitable on DVD, Blu-Ray, and other home-viewing media, such as television. In addition to its domestic box office, *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* sold over 250,000 DVD units in the first year after its release (Robinson 4). *Splice*'s home-viewing release was also lucrative. The film stayed on Blockbuster's Top 10 DVD rentals and purchases list in both Canada and the United States for two months ("Blockbuster"; "Predators"). Beyond the sales statistics of individual films, in November, 2011, Telefilm Canada made a major revision to its filmmaking incentive program that recognized the importance of home-viewing and other non-theatrical modes of film spectatorship. Although Canada's federal funding agency will retain its explicit

annual goal of accruing a 5% stake in the country's yearly box office revenue, a new index for Canadian cinematic success has been introduced that "will account for foreign sales, DVD and VOD [Video on Demand] deals, festival acclaim, and international prizes" (Szklarski). This change in Telefilm's policy reveals the importance of home-viewing media and festival showings in Canadian cinema, and could drastically improve the respective future prospects of Canada's popular and arthouse cinemas.

The first decade of the twenty-first century produced often unpredictable financial and critical outcomes for English-language Canadian popular cinema. For every financial success story, like most of the films analyzed in this study, there were many commercial and critical failures. Telefilm's policy change, however, gestures toward a collective need to redefine commercial or popular success in relation to English-language Canadian cinema. Is it enough for a film to be a critical success without earning large sums of money at the domestic box office? Or, alternatively, should reviewers' assessments be ignored in favour of populist, escapist entertainment that could produce more lucrative theatrical grosses? Truthfully, there are upsides and downsides to both situations, and there are films, like *Pontypool*, *Gunless*, and *The Trotsky* (Jacob Tierney 2009) that reveal negative consequences to each of the aforementioned options[25]. A combination of these options would undoubtedly be most appropriate. A study of this size cannot comprehensively answer these questions, but this extended discussion of aspirationally popular English-language Canadian films from the first decade of the twenty-first century reveals that Anglophone Canada's entertainment cinema is consistently striving toward establishing itself in the nation's popular culture. The films in this study show that Canadian filmmakers are frequently revising and reinterpreting genre codes to create a popular cinema that, for better or worse, markedly reflects Canada. Ultimately, the determinants of a film's success or failure are financially, industrially, geographically, and culturally relative, demonstrating how the establishment of an Anglophone Canadian popular cinema will depend upon changing definitions of popularity in the future. For

[25] Despite many glowing reviews from prominent Canadian critics, such as Brendan Kelly and Brian Johnson, *The Trotsky*, made for $6.4 million, only grossed approximately $2 million domestically.

now, the commercial success of a particular English-language Canadian film is contingent upon its box office gross, but, with the current changes in viewing venues and distribution avenues, that determinant could change with the transforming of the viewing practices of film audiences.

In the discussion of Paul Gross, I paraphrased Liam Lacey's description of the writer-director as "the seeker for the holy grail of Canadian popular taste" to suggest that this epithet could be ascribed to any Canadian filmmaker that tries to access a popular English-speaking audience. Indeed, Canadian directors and producers are ceaselessly releasing English-language films that aim to become popular at the domestic box office. In this new decade, films like *Hobo with a Shotgun*, the hockey-comedies *Breakaway* (Robert Lieberman 2011) and *Goon* (Michael Dowse 2012), the hockey-oriented musical *Score: A Hockey Musical* (Michael McGowan 2010), and the comedy-melodrama *Take This Waltz* (Sarah Polley 2012) gesture toward Anglophone Canada's continued attempts to establish a popular filmmaking industry. *Men with Brooms*, *Passchendaele*, *Splice*, and *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* have allowed brief appearances of the grail, which will entice other seekers to continue making films, in the hope that they will lead English-language Canadian cinema toward the eventual discovery of a dependable popular audience.

Works Cited and Referenced

"*48 Hrs.*" *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

"2011 Box Office #1's by Weekend Gross." *Moviemoxie.blogspot.com*. MovieMoxie, n.d. Web. 2 Nov 2011.

Adams, James. "Gross's Passion No *Porky's*." *The Globe and Mail* 22 Oct 2008. Print.

Altman, Rick. *Film/Genre*. London: British Film Institute, 1999. Print.

Amsden, Cynthia. "Canadian Comedy, Eh?: Paul Gross's *Men with Brooms* and Steve Smith's *Red Green's Duct Tape Forever*." *Take 1* 14.50 (2005): 20-26. Print.

Anderson, Jason. Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. 8 Mar 2002. Print.

Anderson, Melissa. "*Pontypool* Babbles a Lot, for a Zombie Flick." Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *The Village Voice* 27 May 2009. Print.

"*Bad Boys*." *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

Bailey, Patricia. "A Formula for Fromage." Rev. of *Bon Cop Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *The Ottawa Citizen* 6 Nov. 2006: A15. Print.

---. "Tierneys Team Up on *Trotsky*." *Playback* 29 Sep. 2008: 20. Print.

Barker, Andrew. Rev. of *Hobo with a Shotgun*, by Jason Eisener. *Variety* 22 Jan 2011. Print.

Bayles, Martha. "Portraits of Mars." *The Wilson Quarterly* 27.3 (2003): 12-19. Print.

Beard, William. "Thirty-Two Paragraphs about David Cronenberg." *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980.* Eds. William Beard and Jerry White. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 2002. 144-159. Print.

Bell, Robert. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *Exclaim!* Jul. 2010: E1. Print.

Berliner, Todd. "Genre Film as Booby Trap: 1970s Genre Bending and the French Connection." *Cinema Journal* 40.3 (2001): 25-46. Print.

"Bilingual Cop Movie Goes Gunning for a Lofty Goal." Editorial. *The Vancouver Sun* 9 Aug. 2006: A10. Print.

"Blockbuster: *Splice* Tops DVD Rental for Week Ending Oct. 17." *The Canadian Press* 19 Oct. 2010. Print.

Boluk, Stephanie and Wylie Lenz. "Introduction: Generation Z, the Age of Apocalypse." *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture*. Eds. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011. 1-17. Print.

"Boo! *Halloween* Scares Up Record 4-Day Debut." *Associated Press* 3 Sep. 2007. Print.

"Box Office des Films Québécois de 2011." *FilmsduQuébec.over-blog.com*. OverBlog Inc., n.d. Web. 25 Jul. 2012.

Bradshaw, Peter. Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. 15 Oct. 2009. Print.

Butler, Ivan. *The War Film*. South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1974. Print.

Chantelois, Mathieu. "Paul Gross' War Wounds." *Via Destinations* 5.4 (2008): 28-33. Print.

Chapman, James. *War and Film*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008. Print.

Cherry, Brigid. *Horror*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Cobban, William, dir. *Mountie: Canada's Mightiest Myth*. National Film Board of Canada, 1998. Video.

Cockrell, Eddie. Rev. of *Passchendaele*. *Variety* 4 Sep 2008. Print.

Cole, Stephen. "Zombie Bring Out the Best in Bruce McDonald." Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *The Globe and Mail* 6 Mar. 2009. Print.

Cole, Susan G. “Gross’s War Effort.” *Now* 16 Oct 2008: 98. Print.

---. Rev. of *Passchendaele*. *Now* 16 Oct 2008: 98. Print.

Crofts, Stephen. “Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s.” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14.3 (1993): 49-67. Print.

“Dawn of the Dead.” *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 20 Jun 2012.

Dinoff, Dustin. “Anagram’s Pet Project.” *Playback* 4 Jul. 2005: 13. Print.

---. “Not Foolproof at Box Office.” *Playback* 13 Oct. 2003: 14. Print.

Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Eberwein, Robert. “Introduction.” *The War Film*. Ed. Robert Eberwein. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 2005. 1-22. Print.

Elsaesser, Thomas. “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama.” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. 512-535. Print.

Farquharson, Vanessa. “All-Canadien Buddy Flics.” Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *National Post* 18 Aug. 2006: PM3. Print.

---. “A Goofier, Less Austere Russian Revolutionary; Jay Baruchel Gets Nerdy Again in *The Trotsky*.” Rev. of *The Trotsky*, by Jacob Tierney. *National Post* 12 May 2010: AL3. Print.

Ferguson, Lee. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *CBC.ca*. Canadian Broadcast Corp., 3 Jun. 2010. Web. 10 Jun 2012.

“*Fido*.” *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

“Film Box Office Wrap: for the Weekend of May 14-16.” *Daily Variety* 307.32 (2010): 8. Print.

Fleming, Michael. “Twisted Moves to Texas.” *Variety* 8 Oct. 2009. Print.

“*Foolproof*.” *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

French, Philip. Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *The Observer* 18 Oct. 2009. Print.

Frost, Laura. “Black Screens, Lost Bodies: The Cinematic Apparatus of 9/11 Horror.” *Horror After 9/11*. Eds. Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller. Austin: U of Texas P, 2011. 13-39. Print.

Frow, John. *Cultural Studies Cultural Value*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. Print.

Gittings, Christopher E. *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Glassman, Marc. “Maverick McDonald Takes on Zombie Genre.” *Playback*. Telefilm Canada Inc., 1 Sep. 2008. Web. 20 Jun 2012.

Gombo, Phinjo. “Curling for Dollars.” *The Toronto Star* 23 Feb 2002: J3. Print.

Groen, Rick. “*Splice*: Who’s the Monster – the Creator or the Deadly Creation?” Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *The Globe and Mail* 4 Jun. 2010. Print.

Guy, Hannah. Rev. of *Passchendaele*. *Exclaim*! Nov 2008. Print.

Hall, Stuart. “What is this Black in Black Popular Culture?” *Black Popular Culture*. Ed. Gina Dent. Seattle: Bay Press, 1992. Print.

Hantke, Steffen. “My Baby Ate the Dingo: the Visual Construction of the Monstrous Infant in Horror Film.” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 22.2 (2011): 96-112. Print.

Hays, Matthew. “Bad Seed.” Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *Montreal Mirror* 4 Jun. 2010. Print.

---. "*Bon Cop, Bad Cop* and Canada's Two Solitudes." *Cineaste* 32.4 (2007): 20-25. Print.

---. "Canadian Cheese: Men with Brooms is English Canada's Answer to Les Boys." *Montreal Mirror* 8 Mar 2002. Print.

---. "The Talking Dead." Interview with Bruce McDonald. *Montreal Mirror* 13 Mar. 2009. Print.

Hébert, Chantal. "Low-Brow Policy Sweeps Aside Ambitions for our Film Industry." *The Toronto Star* 11 Mar 2002. Print.

Hedetoft, Ulf. "Contemporary Cinema: Between Cultural Globalisation and National Interpretation." *Cinema and Nation*. Eds. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 278-297. Print.

Higson, Andrew. "The Concept of National Cinema." *Film and Nationalism*. Ed. Alan Williams. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2002. 52-67. Print.

"Hobo with a Shotgun (2011)." *Imdb.com*. Amazon, n.d. Web. 2 Nov 2011.

Holden, Stephen. "A Surprise Is in Store for this Shock Jock." Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *The New York Times* 28 May. 2009. Print.

Hornaday, Ann. "*Splice*: Inhuman Punishment." Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *The Washington Post* 4 Jun. 2010. Print.

"Hostel." *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 20 Jun 2012.

Howell, Peter. "Brooms Keep on Sweeping." *The Toronto Star* 20 Mar 2002. Print.

---. "The Full Mountie." Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. *The Toronto Star* 8 Mar 2002: D1-D2. Print.

---. "Guns, Bon Mots Bridge Two Solitudes." Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *Toronto Star* 18 Aug. 2006: D6. Print.

---. “Hobo with a Shotgun: Tramp-Champ.” Rev. of *Hobo with a Shotgun*, by Jason Eisener. *Toronto Star* 24 Mar 2011. Print.

---. “*Pontypool*: Frightfully Canadian.” Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *The Toronto Star* 6 Mar. 2009. Print.

---. “*Splice*: Gods and Monsters.” Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *The Toronto Star* 3 Jun. 2010. Print.

---. “Testament to Canada’s Sacrifices.” Rev. of *Passchendaele*, by Paul Gross. *Toronto Star* 17 Oct 2008: E1. Print.

Johnson, Brian D. Rev. of *Passchendaele*, by Paul Gross. *Maclean’s* 15 Oct 2008. Print.

---. “Romancing the Stone.” *Maclean’s* 4 Mar 2002: 50-55. Print.

---. “Sarah Polley’s Freudian Nightmare.” Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *Maclean’s* 123.22 (2010): 78. Print.

---. “Sexing Up Our *Trailer Park Boys*.” Rev. of *Trailer Park Boys: The Movie*, by Mike Clattenburg. *Maclean’s* 9 Oct. 2006: 77-78. Print.

---. “Who Knew Trotsky was so Funny? A Comedy about a Montreal Student Obsessed with the Red Army Hero is a Surprise Hit.” Rev. of *The Trotsky*, by Jacob Tierney. *Maclean’s* May 2010: 65. Print.

Kelly, Brendan. “Bon Box Office, Bad English Canadians.” *National Post* 11 Oct. 2006: B3. Print.

---. “*Bon Cop, Bad Cop*’s Box Office Success Fails to Break Québec Border.” *CanWest News* 7, Oct. 2006: 1. Print.

---. “Canucks Give Fest a Scare.” *Variety* 18-24 Jan. 2010: 6, 8. Print.

---. “Canucks Look for Yucks: New Crop of Comedies is Aud-Friendly.” *Variety* 31 Aug. 2009: 14. Print.

---. “It’s All Fun and Games until an Ice Pick Arrives; *The Trotsky*, Anglo-Montreal Film Recounts Story of Left-Wing Teen’s Hijinks.” *National Post* 16 Oct. 2008: AL12. Print.

---. “The Language Cops.” Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *The Gazette* [Montreal] 3 Aug. 2006: D1. Print.

Kimmel, Michael and Amy Aronson. *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003. Print.

King, Geoff. *Film Comedy*. London: Wallflower P, 2002. Print.

Kirkland, Bruce. “Following his Passchendaele.” *Toronto Sun* 3 Sep 2008: 48. Print.

---. “Passchendaele: Gross’ Personal Odyssey.” *Toronto Sun* 16 Oct 2008. Print.

---. “Paul’s Populist Passion.” *Toronto Sun* 2 Feb 2009: 38. Print.

---. “Paul’s Winning Passion.” *Toronto Sun* 17 Oct 2008. Print.

Knelman, Martin. “Pushing Brooms in Very Unusual Ways.” *The Toronto Star* 18 Nov 2001: D3. Print.

Knight, Chris. “The Storm Troopers are the Good Guys this Time.” *National Post* 17 Oct 2008: PM6. Print.

Koehler, Robert. Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. *Variety* 25 Mar 2002. Print.

Lacey, Liam. “Hobo with a Shotgun: Droll and Savvy Satire, with Carnage.” Rev. of *Hobo with a Shotgun*, by Jason Eisener. *The Globe and Mail* 25 Mar 2011. Print.

---. “No Clean Sweep.” Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. *The Globe and Mail* 8 Mar 2002. Print.

---. “Putting the Passion into Passchendaele.” Rev. of *Passchendaele*. *The Globe and Mail* 17 Oct 2008: R5. Print.

Laderman, David. "What a Trip: the Road Film and American Culture." *Journal of Film and Video* 48.1 (1996): 41-57. Print.

Laforest, Kevin. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *Voir.ca*. Urbacom Communications Inc. 3 Jun. 2010. Web. 12 Jun 2012.

"Land of the Dead." *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 20 Jun. 2012.

Leach, Jim. *Film in Canada*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.

"*Lethal Weapon*." *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

"Let's Just Make Good Movies." Editorial. *Toronto Star* 18 Aug. 2006: A21. Print.

Lichtenfeld, Eric. *Action Speaks Louder: Violence, Spectacle and the American Action Movie*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2004. Print.

Long, Tom. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *The Detroit News* 4 Jun. 2010. Print.

MacDonald, Gayle. "Hoser Homage." Rev. of *Fubar*, by Michael Dowse. *The Globe and Mail* 28 May 2002: R3. Print.

MacDougall, Heather. "Who Needs Hollywood? The Role of Popular Genre Films in Irish National Cinema." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 35.1 (2009): 39-46. Print.

Macnab, Geoffrey. Rev. of *Passchendaele*. *Sight and Sound* 19.11 (2009): 74. Print.

Matthews, Paul. "The Screening Room: *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*." Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *Toronto Life* 17 Aug. 2006. Print.

McAndrew, Brian. "Canadian Curling: Men with Barooms!... and Barrooms." *The Toronto Star* 8 Mar 2002: D3. Print.

McLaughlin, Gord. "A Heavy Burden for Art: *Foolproof*, *Men with Brooms*, CBC Series All Seen as Make-or-Break." *National Post* 5 Nov. 2003: AL1. Print.

Melnyk, George. *One Hundred Year of Canadian Cinema*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004. Print.

"Men with Brooms." *Serendipitypoint.com/film/men-with-brooms*. Serendipity Point. n.p., n.d., Web. 5 Dec 2011.

"Men with Brooms." *Boxofficemojo.com/menwithbrooms*. Amazon. N.d. Web. 10 Dec 2011.

Neale, Steve. *Genre and Hollywood*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Nelson, Rob. Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *Variety* 17 Sep. 2008. Print.

Neumaier, Joe. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *The New York Daily News* 3 Jun. 2010. Print.

Onstad, Katrina. "Romancing the Stones." Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. *National Post* 8 Mar 2002: PM1-PM2. Print.

Ordoña, Michael. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *The Los Angeles Times* 4 Jun. 2010. Print.

Parent, Marie-Joelle. "Caroline in the City: Canadian Actress Dhavernas is Searching for the Perfect Role." *Toronto Sun* 12 Mar 2009: 59. Print.

"Passchendaele." *Passchendaelethemovie.com*. Rhombus Media. n.p., n.d., Web. 28 Feb 2012.

"Paul Gross Deserves Our Support." Editorial. *The National Post* 17 Oct 2008: A16. Print.

Pellerin, Brigitte. "A Bon Cop Movie." Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *The Ottawa Citizen* 7 Sep. 2006: A14. Print.

"Pontypool." *BoxOfficeMojo.* Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 20 Jun. 2012.

Posner, Michael. “Gross Takes Charge into No-Man’s Land.” *The Globe and Mail* 3 Sep 2008: A3. Print.

“*Predators* Tops Weekly Blockbuster Hit List of Top 10 Renting DVDs.” *PR Newswire* 2 Nov. 2010. Print.

Puig, Claudia. “After a Promising Start, *Splice* Gets Its Wires Crossed.” Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *USA Today* 6 Jun. 2010. Print.

Quarrington, Paul. “Of Ice and Men.” *National Post* 23 Jun 2007. Print.

Quinn, Anthony. Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *The Independent* 15 Oct. 2009. Print.

Randoja, Ingrid. Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. *Now Magazine* 8 Mar 2002. Print.

Redmond, Sean. “The Wonder of Science Fiction.” *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Reader*. Ed. Season Redmond. London and New York: Wallflower P, 2004. 2-4. Print.

Reid, Michael D. “Clash of Solitudes a Gas.” Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *Times-Colonist* [Victoria, B.C.] 18 Aug. 2006: B4. Print.

Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. *Empire Magazine* 8 Mar 2002. Print.

Richler, Noah. “What Could be More Canadian than Hockey?” *National Post* 7 Mar 2002. Print.

Rizov, Vadim. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *Sight and Sound* 20.8 (2010): 75. Print.

Robinson, Marcus. “Home Video Canada Neutral in HD Format War.” *Playback* 22 Jan. 2007: 4. Print.

Rosen, Steven. Rev. of *Men with Brooms*. *Denver Post* 20 Sep 2002. Print.

Rowe, David. “Time and Timelessness in Sport Film.” *Sport in Society* 11.2 (2008): 146-158. Print.

Rubin, Steven Jay. *Combat Films: 1945-1970*. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1981. Print.

“*Rush Hour*.” *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 2 Jul. 2012.

“*Rush Hour 2*.” *BoxOfficeMojo.* Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 2 Jul. 2012.

“*Rush Hour 3*.” *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 2 Jul. 2012.

“Saw.” *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc. n.d. Web. 20 Jun 2012.

Schaefer, Glen. “Francophone Touch Helps Cop Find Popular Pulse.” Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *The Province* [Vancouver] 18 Aug. 2006: B4. Print.

Siegel, Tina. “Canadian Films Have Come a Long Way.” *Sudbury Star* 3 Nov. 2005: C2. Print.

Singer, Ben. “Female Power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama: The Etiology of an Anomaly.” *Camera Obscura* 8.1-22 (1990): 90-129. Print.

Sperounes, Sandra. “Givin’r One More Time; Sequel to Cult Mockumentary *Fubar* Opens Edmonton Film Festival.” *Edmonton Journal* 24 Sep. 2010: D1. Print.

“Statistics on Co-Production.” *Telefilm*. Telefilm Canada, inc., 27 Apr 2012. Web. 13 May 2012.

Stone, Jay. “*Bon Cop, Bad Cop* is a Good Idea that Never Finds Its Tone.” Rev. of *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, by Eric Canuel. *The Vanvouver Sun* 18 Aug. 2006: H3. Print.

---. “*Bon Cop, Bad Cop* Wins Top Genie as Best Movie.” *The Ottawa Citizen* 14 Fe. 2007: B7. Print.

Strauss, Marise. “*Gunless* Shoots Blanks.” *Playback* 3 May 2010. Print.

Szklarski, Cassandra. "New Telefilm Index Recognizes Cultural Impact, As well As Box Office Wins." *The Canadian Press* 23 Nov. 2011. Print.

Takeuchi, Craig. "*Trailer Park Boys 2* Grosses $1.32 million on Opening Weekend." *Straight.com*. Vancouver Free Press, Inc., 28 Sep. 2009. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

"*The Trotsky*." *BoxOffice.com*. Box Office Media, Inc, n.d. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

"They Love Paul Gross in Sudbury." *National Post* 17 Aug 2001: B8. Print.

Tookey, Christopher. Rev. of *Splice*, by Vincenzo Natali. *The Daily Mail* 23 Jul. 2010. Print.

"*Trailer Park Boys: The Movie*." *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 3 Jul. 2012.

Travers, Peter. Rev. of *Hobo with a Shotgun*, by Jason Eisener. *Rolling Stone* 5 May 2011. Print.

"Twilight." *BoxOfficeMojo*. Amazon, Inc., n.d. Web. 20 Jun 2012.

Vanderburgh, Jennifer. "Ghostbusted! Popular Perceptions of Canadian Cinema." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12.2 (2003): 81-98. Print.

Vatnsdal, Caelum. *They Came from Within: A History of Canadian Horror Cinema*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring P, 2004. Print.

Vlessing, Etan. "Telefilm Canada Presents Golden Box Office Award to *Splice*." *Playback*. Telefilm Canada Inc., 6 May 2011. Web. 20 Jun 2012.

Walker, Susan. "Language No Barrier: Ontario's Pride Colm Feore and Quebec Hunk Patrick Huard Star in the Ultimate Canadian Buddy Movie." *Toronto Star* 16 Aug. 2006: E2. Print.

Walton, Dawn. "Paul Gross's Obsession, Our Country's Horror." *The Globe and Mail* 21 June 2008: R1, R10. Print.

Wells, Paul. *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch*. London: Wallflower P, 2000. Print.

Wetta, Frank J. and Stephen J. Curley. *Celluloid Wars*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992. Print.

Whyte, Murray. "Can Quirky Hybrid Movie Cop Quebec's Energy?" *Toronto Star* 13 Aug. 2006: C21. Print.

Wilner, Norman. Rev. of *Pontypool*, by Bruce McDonald. *Now Magazine* 4 Mar. 2009. Print.

Wise, Wyndham. "*Take One*'s 2002 Survey of Canadian Cinema." *Take 1* 11.41 (2003): 50-51. Print.

Zacharias, Yvonne. "*Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, Big Money." *CanWest News* 28 Apr. 2007: 1. Print.

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Sean Fitzpatrick
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2006-2010 B.A.
Honours and Awards:	Chair's Entrance Scholarship 2010
Related Work Experience	Teaching Assistant The University of Western Ontario 2010-2012