

## **Invasions of the Royphiles: How Dupuis' Fans Make Me Love Quebec Cinema**

This paper examines the discourse of fan websites, especially that of a website dedicated to the works of a Quebec actor, and argues that the website performs the function of what Foucault calls a transformation of desire into discourse (*History* 20-1). Theoretically grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's writing on culture and the formation of taste (1984) and Foucault's on discourse (1977, 78), "Invasions of the Royphiles" reverses the role of the woman as centre of voyeuristic pleasure and posits the female gaze as that which objectifies the male subject. Building on studies of spectatorship and audience response by Ien Ang (1985) and Jackie Stacey (1994), and recent works on fan websites by Matt Hills (2002) and Gwennlian-Jones (2003), this paper investigates a discourse generated by the consuming female gaze, a discourse that prolongs a desire that cannot be fulfilled. Roy Dupuis Online (RDO) is a website dedicated to the Quebec actor Roy Dupuis, who gained international attention through the television series, *La Femme Nikita* (1997-2001). Though the series has ended, RDO maintains its desire for the male object through ritualistic online posting and through consuming all cultural products related to Dupuis, thus creating a unique profile of Quebec within Canada.

Unlike other fan websites that are predominantly gossip- and image-driven, RDO is text-driven with strict editorial guidelines. The website provides sections such as detailed reviews of Dupuis' works in theatre, films, and television, a Library of interviews in French (translated) and English, and an active Message Board. The Message Board (MB) discusses topics such as Quebec's relationship with English-speaking Canada, Quebec film culture, and members' analyses of articles. Examining textual productions from RDO as well as referencing the television series *La Femme Nikita* (LFN) this paper addresses the issue of female spectatorship

and agency in the context of television viewing. Just as Janice Radway has argued for “an analysis of the pleasures of romance” and Ien Ang has shown that the female audience of *Dallas* could be “active and selective” instead of being “passively positioned by the text” (Stacey 44-5), I suggest that the discourse of a fan website can be usefully analysed in terms of discourse and desire. Furthermore, an active and dynamic fan website such as the RDO, which engages in debates on cultural identity and production, can provide insightful information about representation and perception of national identities, as illustrated by several years of intensive interpretative activity, generated by a desire that is no longer based on one character in a television series, but an encompassing interest that includes all works of Roy Dupuis within the context of Quebec culture.

### **The Female Gaze, Spectatorship, and Fan Websites**

The television series *La Femme Nikita* belongs very definitively in the category of popular culture, a category that would have received scant academic attention several decades ago.

However, current intellectual discussions have treated popular culture not as

degraded and elite culture as elevating. Instead, the new studies recognize the power of the ordinary, accept the commonplace as a legitimate object of inquiry [...] and ask serious questions about the role of popular culture in political and social life. (Mukerji 2)

As Pierre Bourdieu points out in *Distinction*, “popular entertainment secures the spectator’s participation in the show and collective participation in the festivity which it occasions,” which is the very opposite effect desired by patrons of high art, in their desire for “impeccable formalism” and distance from familiarity (34). More than Bourdieu could envision, spectatorial participations have become much more common in the age of the internet, as fan websites are recognized as the channel through which members of an electronic community converse with

each other about the objects of their interest.<sup>1</sup> This electronic discourse contributes in important ways to understanding “the role of popular culture in political and social life” as well as gender identities and relationships.

While Bourdieu’s seminal work focuses on class distinction and its relation to judgement of taste, women cultural critics have been investigating ways to analyse female spectatorship and its gender and social implications. Since Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), criticism of “the gaze” has moved away from the all dominant “male gaze” to include studies of the female gaze in the consumption of cultural forms, be it cinematic or literary. Janice Radway’s attempt to treat readers of romance fiction seriously is one example. In her study of an “interpretive community of romance readers,” Radway tries to understand how and why women read this particular genre (470). Also published in the 80s, Ien Ang’s study of viewers of the popular television series *Dallas* concentrates on the enigma of the pleasure derived from watching *Dallas* (17). Soliciting letters from *Dallas* fans, Ang’s ethnographic study treats these letters ‘symptomatically’, searching for “what is behind the explicitly written.”

Through deciphering the ideologies implicit in these fan and non-fan letters, Ang believes a critic can get to know something about what experiencing pleasure [...] implies for these writers – what textual characteristics of *Dallas* organize that experience and in which ideological context it acquires social and cultural meanings. (11)

Equally critical of theorizing the female audience as passive victims of the male gaze, Jackie Stacey posits that feminist criticism can be usefully engaged in studying female spectatorship in promoting female agency, and that an “interactive model of text/audience/context” can account for the “complexity of the viewing process” (47). Instead of dismissing female pleasure in participating in popular culture (cinema, television) as collusion with patriarchal consumerism,

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<sup>1</sup> A recent example of fan websites and their interactions with cultural production is Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Jackson’s publicized respect for fan opinions and participations posted on theonline.net (see “LA Times: Partying with the fellowship of the fans.”)

Stacey wants to situate any study of the female audience within a specific viewing context to fully understand the interaction between the viewer and the spectacle, and its implication in a broader social context.

Certainly, a study of, and dialogue with, online fan websites form the interactive model that Stacey proposes. I discovered RDO when I was looking for additional information on the Michael character in *La Femme Nikita*, whom I was interested in when researching alternate warrior figures for a study on masculinity. There are many other fan websites on both Roy Dupuis and *La Femme Nikita*, both in English and other languages. But RDO distinguishes itself from other Roy Dupuis websites in that it has strictly observed editorial guidelines, it is text- instead of image-driven, and it interests itself in Quebec culture as part of its desire for the actor. My criteria for choosing a website to study ironically reinforce the division between “popular reaction” and “aesthetic distancing,” because in studying RDO and its discourse, I am introducing “a distance, a gap [...] by displacing the interest from the ‘content’” (Bourdieu 34). In analysing RDO discourse ‘symptomatically’, I resort to academic strategies that “theorize the media cult and its fandoms” not through a primary allegiance to the role of ‘fan’ but to ‘academia’ (Hills 9-10). Instead of reading the texts and viewing the performances with passion, I hyper-rationalize the responses of Dupuis’ fans as articulated on the fan website.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time as my critical gaze functions panoptically on the Internet, I am made aware that as an outsider to the fan discourse and someone who had not seen the show when it was first aired, I am not party to various MB conversations, or even references that Royphiles have been sharing on a daily basis. For instance, to understand a thread that explicates the narrative arc of the first 4 episodes in season 2, I had to wait and hope that I could catch reruns of

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<sup>2</sup> This hyper-rationalization results in some interesting exchanges between viv/RDO and me, when we disagree in explications of certain scenes, or even certain costuming choices.

these episodes on the television channels available to my viewing area, or wait till the episodes become available on DVD format.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, in order to understand one simple reference in a thread, I would need to read other materials on other related fan websites for collateral information. Thus, fan website discourses create their own textual history that requires a kind of detailed research that is not dissimilar to academic research. Furthermore, fan websites often require computer programmes that would allow the viewer to open sound files and play video clips, as well as a certain amount of computer literacy to access all the data in images and texts that are on various sites. Altogether, a dedicated and sophisticated fan website is inscribed with “a certain type of cultural accumulation and a certain image of cultural accomplishment” that Bourdieu accredits to academic *habitus* (25).

While being an ‘ethnographic lurker’ of the website, I became aware that I was performing what Matt Hills calls “academic surveillance” of RDO (173). In order to study the website in a more interactive way, as well as to gain faster access to information, I contacted one of the administrators and we have since been conducting an ongoing exchange on the subject of the website, Roy Dupuis, the website itself, interpretative approaches, as well as Quebec culture. My study of the MB discourse and other texts on RDO confirms other cultural critics’ claim that female fans are active and selective, that their gaze is as powerful as the male gaze, and that they derive pleasure not only from watching and analysing their subject’s performances, but also from communicating with each other on related topics. As critics of other fan communities have attested, RDO consists of “a collection of previously disconnected individuals” who have taken their shared interest, in this instance, a Quebec actor, and “transformed it into a rich and

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<sup>3</sup> This status of the cognoscente is emphasized also by the fans’ usual reference to all episodes by the acronyms of the title as well as acronyms that specifically refer to events and characters in the show. Hence, *LFN* fans have their own coded language: “the SOTW in BTP disturbs a key HR moment” can be translated as the ‘slime of the week’ in “Beyond the Pale” disturbs a key ‘hopeless/hopeful romantic’ moment.

meaningful interpersonal social world” (Baym 21).<sup>4</sup> What Gwennlian-Jones says about online Xenaverse can be applied to RDO, which, like other fan websites, creates intertextual connections to other sites through hyperlinks, thus becoming “a boundless, ever-evolving network of associations that exist in a constant state of flux” (Gwennlian-Jones 187). However, most unique of all is RDO’s many engaged discussions involving various facets of Quebec popular culture. Based on the discourse on one single actor, the site has, in a way, invented a “Quebec” cultural identity for international consumption.<sup>5</sup>

### **Roy Dupuis Online<sup>6</sup>**

The website Roy Dupuis Online (RDO), previously known as Chloe’s Roy Dupuis Homepage, consists of an international membership of over 270 people in an age group between 17 and the 50s. These members, who for the purpose of this paper are called “Royphiles,” come from as diverse geographical areas as the US, Israel and China. They have made to date over 10,000 posts. RDO is managed by 4 professional women working in information technology, system analysis, and banking. In an interview conducted by a website dedicated to *La Femme Nikita*, The Word From Section, the 4 members who run RDO explain that the website was created after fans attended a *La Femme Nikita* Convention in 1998 in Toronto. After the convention, “a group of us spent several days in Montreal [...] and picked up copies of a number of articles from the library and subsequently ordered originals” (Evans “Website to Watch”). These articles would then be posted in the Library section of the website. In addition to a comprehensive library in

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<sup>4</sup> See also Jennifer Hayward, 8-14 and Matt Hills, 1-23 on fan communities.

<sup>5</sup> The term “invention” is a reference to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition*, especially in the discussions of inculcating beliefs through ritual practices and the invented component in a “national” identity (1-14). It should be pointed out that the “inventing” examined in this paper is an external, and not a Quebec, endeavour.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix for interview with viv/RDO.

both English and French (translated), the other two text-driven sections on RDO are the Career History and the MB. These three sections construct a distinct Quebec identity that is accessible to all Internet visitors to RDO.

While the MB is made available to both Royphiles and guests, online posters are warned that the “board is for the purpose of discussing the works of Roy Dupuis, not for gossiping about his personal life.” Unlike other fan websites – dedicated to Dupuis or other celebrities – RDO’s MB discourages the proliferation of images, thus maintaining a uniform appearance.<sup>7</sup> To further reinforce the editorial strictness of RDO, posters are reminded to keep their signatures short. Otherwise, the moderators would either request changes or “if you ignore that request, then we’ll edit it for you” (RDO “Board Guidelines”). As an illustration of the moderators adhering to their principles, one poster was gently but firmly dissuaded from pursuing an enquiry into Dupuis’ love life. Instead, the threads concentrate on discussions of his works, Quebec cinema and popular culture, as well as analyses of articles about and interviews with Dupuis.

Unlike the MB, the Library and Career History sections are managed by the moderators. The Career History contains, apart from detailed biographical information, a complete list of all the theatre productions Dupuis was involved in from 1985 to 1994, a complete list of all his films as well as television shows. Some entries also provide synopses and reviews.<sup>8</sup> If one opens the *Les Invasions Barbares* page, one will find production information, a film review, links to a table of the awards the film has been nominated for and won, to the discussion thread on the MB, as well as to an article on Quebec cinema and funding crisis; and in a charming postscript, an exchange between Denys Arcand and the film reviewer for RDO. It is also in Career History that

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<sup>7</sup> RDO explains in “Board Guidelines” that excessive images would take a longer time to load.

<sup>8</sup> It was in the Career History that I first read a review of *Les Invasions Barbares*, which was screened at a Gala Performance at the London Film Festival, October 29<sup>th</sup> 2003. The film was not shown in English-speaking Canada until November, when reviews of the film appeared in newspapers. It should be mentioned that on RDO, the French titles of works are usually used.

one finds The Michael Files. Running over 36,000 words, The Michael Files is a comprehensive summary, review, with hyperlinks to sound files from the series, of every episode of *La Femme Nikita* from the perspective of the character Michael. The Michael Files has formed a core study for fans of the character as well as of the television series.<sup>9</sup>

Just as exhaustive as the Career History is the Library. A reader will find, to date, 65 French magazine and 23 newspaper articles (translated into English), and 24 English articles, sometimes with editorial comments.<sup>10</sup> The Library has also catalogued a list of awards Dupuis was nominated for and won, transcripts and captures of television appearances, “behind the scenes” reports of visits to the set of *La Femme Nikita* and conventions, a translation of Claude Henri-Grignon’s 1968 version of the novel *Un Homme et son Pêché*, and a guide to Montreal in the footsteps of Yves, the main character in the 1991 film, *Being at Home with Claude*.<sup>11</sup> Whenever possible, RDO provides both cultural and literary contexts of the works Dupuis has been involved in.

### **“The Thing about Michael”: Analysing Desire**

There have been various serious analyses of *La Femme Nikita* based on the thesis that Nikita is a woman warrior in a patriarchal system. In “La Femme Dilbert” by Tom Carson of *The Village Voice*, the claustrophobic world in the series is compared to “a funhouse mirror of the dystopic ‘90s workplace” and an “empowerment fantasy” for women. In a similar theme, Laura Ng examines Nikita in “‘The Most Powerful Weapon You Have’: Warriors and Gender in *La Femme Nikita*” and concludes that “[t]he figure of Nikita as a woman warrior reflects a

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<sup>9</sup> It is referenced in MB threads on other fan websites and viv/RDO informed me that each instalment was awaited eagerly when she was first posting her reviews on RDO.

<sup>10</sup> These numbers will increase as more interviews will appear when Dupuis’ finished projects are screened in 2004 and 5.

<sup>11</sup> Dupuis plays Alexis Labranche in the film version of Grignon’s book and Yves in *Being at Home with Claude*. There is no published English translation of *Un Homme et son Pêché*.

breakdown in traditional gendered social roles in which the man is the hero and the woman is the faithful sidekick or damsel in distress” (114-5). Dawn Connolly’s *La Femme Peta*, though consisting of substantial sections analysing the first 3 seasons of the series, is an unofficial biography of the actor who plays Nikita. While concentrating on Nikita as a trailblazing woman warrior is understandable from a feminist perspective, it is equally important to analyse female desires and objectification within any discussions of gender relationships and their power dynamics.

In the thread “The Thing about Michael” on the RDO MB, members’ postings that lasted over a 2-month period attempt to dissect the attraction of the Michael-character. A summary shows that certain elements in the character consistently trigger female desire. He is desirable because he is a man of professional integrity and not of idle words; he is fearless and stoical, but remains aware of his vulnerability; he performs the function of a guardian and not a few contributors mention his knightly quality. To watch him out-manoeuvre his superiors and negotiate Section politics also becomes a lesson in how to deal with the frustrations and stresses of real life. In short, the character is a popular cultural avatar of the medieval knight; for instance, the tragic Tristan, the archetypal knight and lover in Gottfried von Strassburg’s epic poem. Dupuis himself seems to support this characterization. In a 1998 interview in *Time Out New York*, he claims that he “wanted him to have a romantic look because I think of Michael as a modern knight” (Che “Who’s L’Homme?”). Another important character interpretation Dupuis provides is that, despite the plot developments, the character “itself hasn’t changed that much” (USA 2000).

Both comments point to a characterization that highlights the centrality of honour and chivalry, an inflexible inner core of self-knowledge, as well as the futility of actions that dooms

any tragic hero in literature and other cultural forms. A tragic hero, no matter his attempts to change the course of events, must face suffering and eventual death. It is not surprising that the series uses dramatic irony obsessively as a plot device. Thus, on the one hand fans of Michael desire him for his apparent sexuality. At the same time, they are attracted to him because he represents a masculinity whose genealogy dates back to a period that Denis de Rougemont believes is the beginning of the concept of romantic love in the western world. Michael, then, is a representation of a cultural construction of ideal masculinity that we can find in literature, operas, and paintings.

It is a masculinity that differs from the overtly aggressive and exaggeratedly muscular type we find in Hollywood films. In *Love in the Western World*, de Rougemont chooses the Tristan myth as the supreme example of courtly love. Explaining why Tristan, although superior to everyone and feeling passionately about Iseult, does not possess her and instead, honours King Mark's prior claim, de Rougemont writes: "[H]e delivers her to Mark, and he does so because the rule of courtly love did not allow a passion of this kind 'to turn into reality'" (34-5). The key masculine features in this instance are unflinching restraint and an unwavering loyalty to a code that precedes the personal, much like Michael's self-control and his ability to deny his personal inclinations for professional reasons. To further the analogy between Tristan and Michael, the love affair in *La Femme Nikita* is predicated on its unhappy ending, just as the Tristan myth remains powerfully mythical because the lovers are unhappily parted from the very beginning. Romantic love, as opposed to quotidian love, as de Rougemont shows, "abounds in obstructions" and lovers in Romance need "not one another's presence, but one another's absence" (42). It is this reference to a medieval conception of romance, embodied in this black-clad figure, that the fans are drawn to.

Michael as embodiment of interdiction and mortality also fascinates the viewers. In his black suit or black combat gear, his only accessory a gun, Michael visually affirms what Anne Hollander writes about the colour black in the history of clothes: “Black conjures fear of the blind darkness of night and the eternal darkness of death” (365). What Hollander calls “the mordant beauty of black” is also the colour of the priest, a sexually unavailable figure. Another group who wore black were “[m]embers of the Spanish court and princes and nobleman of the Holy Roman Empire [...] for sombre emphasis” (371). By the nineteenth century, black became the evening uniform for men in society. Thus, black connotes asceticism, death, forbidden sexuality, courtly formality, and regal aloofness. Viewers are generally attracted to these qualities they see in Michael, someone unattainable in spite of his propinquity. These qualities are intensified as Michael never indulges in any activities such as buying grocery or paying for parking. The total absence of mundane but essential daily practices in his presentation provides the illusion that he is much like royalty, who never has to pay for a meal in a public restaurant.

Though Dupuis’ masculine sexual appeal is never in question, Michael is ambiguously masculine in that, despite his physical ability to kill and his sexual ability to seduce women, he is markedly androgynous in seasons 1 and 2.<sup>12</sup> His long flowing hair, strong jawline, and chiselled features, which strongly resemble a Pre-Raphaelite male or female figure by Burne-Jones or Millais, add credence to this reading of the Michael figure.<sup>13</sup> His deliberate and at times balletic movements can make him curiously dandyish in spite of his profession. His attraction, then, references an older masculine presentation than what we are currently exposed to through popular culture, and makes him a more unique masculine object of desire. In spite of his unquestionable physical strength and heterosexuality, the character is consistently presented as a

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<sup>12</sup> Some of the clothes the character wears resemble high fashion one sees on runways. In one episode, Michael wears a jacket with a corset belt. A similar jacket was shown in Gucci for Women 2003.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Michael in a medieval dress would look very much like William Morris’s *La Belle Iseult*.

wounded male, both physically and psychologically. It is a central trope in the series that Michael is constantly threatened. He can be killed through his professional activities and he can be “cancelled,” in that his superiors sometimes treat him as a threat and not an asset, and concoct elaborate plots to eradicate him. He is repeatedly tested emotionally and psychologically because intimate relationships in the organization are tolerated only as part of strategic planning. Thus, in seasons 1 and 2, when fans became attached to this character, they also saw him wounded 4 times, tortured twice, beaten up, and locked in a chamber set with explosives. In addition, they would have witnessed Michael losing his wife, his friend, his student, and several times, humiliated in a very public way. This characterization escalates in seasons 3 and 4, as Michael encounters more intimate losses and suffers repeated attempts to first emasculate, then kill him.

Michael's allure as the wounded beautiful male is affiliated to the male beauty represented in countless classical paintings; for example, those of St. Sebastian. Whether painted by Van Dyck as a hairless youth gazing coquettishly at the viewer, or by Titian as another hairless youth with flowing black locks looking demurely downward, St. Sebastian has become what Germaine Greer calls “[t]he icon of male vulnerability” (195). St. Sebastian's suffering, aestheticized, captured, and offered to centuries of viewers, is a powerful discourse of desire. The penetrated body, made more vulnerable by its nakedness and feminized by its hairlessness, is at the same time desirable because of its overt manly stoicism, and poignant because the object is hovering on the verge of death. It is this same logic of desire that incites fans to find Michael's androgynous beauty alluring, so much so that they would invest both money and time to remain connected to any Dupuis-related projects. By the time the series screened its last episode in 2001, Royphiles had found other ways to prolong the Michael-discourse and change it into a Dupuis-discourse.

## **The Invention of “Quebec”**

In an MB exchange conducted in June 2002, a thread that begins as a discussion of Dupuis' sexual aura changes into an animated discussion of Quebec film culture and the differences between French and English-speaking Canada. Several Royphiles express puzzlement at the cultural divide between the two “Canadas” that are hinted at in Dupuis' films. These are some of the examples mentioned in the thread: In the enormously popular *Les Filles des Caleb*, Dupuis' character gets into a confrontation with a waiter in a Montreal restaurant where the menu is in English; in *Million Dollar Babies* (1994) the Dionnes are consistently belittled as ignorant Catholics from Quebec. The exchanges on the MB develop from a discussion of Quebec's cultural difference from the rest of Canada to what kind of future would Dupuis have if he should insist on pursuing his career in Quebec. Some Royphiles bemoan the fact that Quebec films are almost impossible to find outside of Canada. Others prefer that Dupuis should be involved in good films that are not mass-marketed, even if he would never have the career of a Hollywood star. In answer to questions regarding the political culture and history of Canada, some website links are posted for further information. Thus, this MB thread shows that while Royphiles are attracted to Dupuis overtly because of his sexual appeal, their desire becomes channelled into other directions that are connected to his cultural and national identity.

Since the cessation of *La Femme Nikita*, Royphiles have been turning to his Quebec projects, as proven by the discussions on the MB regarding films such as *Being at Home with Claude* or *Cap Tourmente* (1993). The page on *Séraphin: Un Homme et son Péché* in Career History consists of a film review, in which the cultural importance of Grignon's work, established already by two feature films, a radio series, and a television series, is highlighted.

The page also provides a hyperlink to an abridged translation of the novel, and another link to a site that outlines the history of adaptations of *Un Homme et son Péché*. Other links include *Séraphin* Gallery, The Making of *Séraphin*, captures, and video clips from the 2003 Jutras, in which the film was nominated for multiple awards, and a translated article from *La Presse* titled “Quebec cinema has its own economics; who risks what?” The release of the DVD of the film was awaited eagerly by Royphiles and the thread that discusses the film on the MB registers 51 replies and 898 views. To date, the MB is running threads that are keeping Royphiles updated regarding Dupuis’ other films that are still in production or will soon be released. All these titles are Quebec films, and with the exception of *Manners of Dying*, in French. Though Royphiles around the world cannot easily access Quebec films, the industry itself is being profiled with enthusiastic rigour by RDO.

Perhaps the Quebec film that has garnered the most attention, both on RDO and in the world, is Denys Arcand’s *Les Invasions Barbares*. So far, the film, in spite of its many awards, is shown only in limited engagements, both in Canada and the US. Many Royphiles have not seen the film yet, but the MB thread on *Les Invasions Barbares* has had 292 replies and 7,668 views. Of course not every single reply is an in-depth discussion of the film, but these numbers show that the topic is vigorously pursued by Royphiles and guests. Three Royphiles saw the film at the London Film Festival, at the Los Angeles Film Festival, and in Washington, D.C. in 2003, and reviewed it respectively. At all three screenings, Arcand was present to answer questions, and on two of these occasions, he was asked by Royphiles about Dupuis’ part in the film. In both conversations, the Royphiles show themselves knowledgeable about Quebec cinema, including Arcand’s own films.<sup>14</sup> On February 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 29<sup>th</sup> 2004, a Dupuis-moment replaced real time when Royphiles kept each other informed, regardless of where they lived, of how many

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<sup>14</sup> Dupuis also has a small part in another Arcand film, *Jesus of Montreal* (1989).

awards *Les Invasions Barbares* received at the Césars in France, the Jutras in Quebec, and the Oscars in Hollywood. All this excitement might suggest that Dupuis has a starring role. But he only appears briefly in 3 scenes, and as Arcand told a Royphile, it was such a small role that he thought Dupuis might not be interested in it.

RDO also regularly posts interviews with and articles about Arcand, the producer, Denise Robert, and the film's actors. Through these postings and hyperlinks, readers become acquainted with Quebec cultural figures such as Rémy Girard. And it is not only stars from *Les Invasions Barbares* who are featured on RDO. In a separate thread, a discussion ensues regarding whether French Canadian cinema should try to make itself more accessible to a wider public. This discussion was generated by *L'Invitation aux images*, a 2003 documentary made by *la Cinémathèque québécoise*. Dupuis plays an archivist in the documentary and also narrates it. Non-French-speaking Royphiles feel that the documentary should be subtitled if Quebec cinema desires a wider audience, not only regarding the documentary, but Quebec films in general. One can detect a certain note of exasperation with what is seen as cultural insularity in Quebec cinema culture in these exchanges.

Perhaps the question an English-speaking Canadian visitor to RDO should ask is: Where is Canada in this proliferation of knowledge about Quebec? The most obvious answer is nowhere. Readers of RDO can find out much about Montreal, but not much about Canada; much about Quebec culture, but not much about Canadian culture. The fact that Dupuis has appeared in several English-language productions, such as the television series *The Last Chapter I and II* (2002, 2003) and the television movie, *Million Dollar Babies*, not to mention *La Femme Nikita*, still does not garner him many interviews and articles in English publications. In the RDO Library, there is one article in the *National Post* in 2000, one in *The Toronto Star* in 2001, and

one in *The Globe and Mail*, also in 2001, at the height of Dupuis' popularity with his international fans. All the other English articles (post-*La Femme Nikita*) are in Montreal publications.<sup>15</sup> However, this synecdochal relationship between Dupuis and Quebec does not necessarily mean that Canada is absent from the Dupuis-discourse. As Foucault points out:

[W]e must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse [...]; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (*History of Sexuality* 100)

As an English-speaking Canadian reader of RDO, I am constantly reminded of the presence of Canada by its very absence. This peculiar nature of Canadian identity is further illustrated when Arcand won multiple awards for *Les Invasions Barbares*. In a long article in *The Guardian*, Karen Fricker only once refers to Canada, and that single mention has to do with the limited release of the film. Quebec is used as a stand-alone designation, just as one would use American or German. Fricker's article is not an exception; Arcand has mainly been called a Quebec director in international press. One can make two assumptions: that Quebec is not perceived as part of Canada, or that everyone knows that to be from Quebec also means that one is a Canadian, an instance when the "multiplicity of discursive elements" can be strategized. However, this attention on Arcand as a Quebec filmmaker does not negate the fact that when the credits roll, Telefilm Canada appears on the screen, or that when the film was entered in competitions, it was listed as a Canadian film. Both Arcand's identity as a Quebec and a Canadian director, and Dupuis' indisputable celebrity status inside Quebec and considerably more modest fame in English-speaking Canada, point to two facts: that Canada has two thriving cultures whose imagined borders are not as porous as one experiences them physically; and that

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<sup>15</sup> Except for a magazine article.

“[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, *History* 101). The scant attention English publications pay Dupuis compared to the exposure he receives as a native son of Quebec illustrates the dynamics and power relationships embedded within discourse. Within institutional discourses (the media, Federal funding agencies) Quebec remains part of Canada, while it also has the power to assert its unique identity through the individual (Dupuis) or cultural forms (cinema). And because of the fluid nature of web discourse, if Dupuis should ever be involved in a major Canadian project outside of Quebec, then English-speaking Canada will have its days in the sun on RDO.

### **Wither Fan Discourse?**

“Writing so as not to die” (Foucault, *Language* 53). Or, writing so that desire does not die. For this reason, RDO (and its earlier incarnation) has been thriving for several years. There is no doubt that website discourse does not have the permanency implied in the print media, and that the flourishing of fan websites are contingent on the fans’ desire for their subjects. However, as long as fan websites and their discourses continue to be an important form of communication in disseminating cultural products, then critics should continue attending to the issues discussed in Cultural and Media Studies.

Contrary to the assumption that fan websites and fan discourse are not worth critical attention, Cultural Studies have encouraged critics to examine both as part of cultural and social network, and to treat them with the same intellectual rigour as one would a canonical work. Website discourse not only can bridge the gap created by class and social differences, but can also resist gender stereotypes. RDO, a website of international fans, is not afraid of

acknowledging female desire. It also transforms desire by intellectually engaging in archiving and analysing all matters that are related to the actor Roy Dupuis<sup>16</sup>. Through RDO the Internet users can learn about not only Dupuis, but also Quebec popular culture. Yet, because of this “provincial” slant, Quebec acquires a distinct and unique identity that precludes English-speaking Canada. Thus, RDO, through its strong female voice, at the same time helps to invent a particular version of Quebec.

Ironically, it is also the “insularity” of Quebec culture that makes it difficult to access works by Roy Dupuis, both physically (in video or DVD), and culturally, in that his works are often in French, sometimes without subtitles. However, it is also Dupuis’ cultural inaccessibility, sequestered in Quebec within the French language, that makes every public appearance of his, whether in print or on television, an event. For example, on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2004, an interview with Roy Dupuis appeared in *The Montreal Gazette*. A Royphile in the US who has a subscription posted the information at 7 in the morning. By 7.58 a link to the article was up on the MB. By late afternoon, the article in its entirety appeared on 4 Roy Dupuis websites that I checked. One is reminded of the fact that the fan community is not confined only within one site, but is connected to related websites, so that often there are cross-referencing amongst Dupuis-related sites.

This community spirit is not restricted to the web, but also offline. Many web members of various sites know each other in real life. In June, some of these fans will be meeting in Montreal to attend charity events that Dupuis is involved in. Based on reading MB postings, Royphiles appear to have an active offline life as well as an active internet life. This bears out the hypothesis that people who belong to online communities can also be socially active in real life

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<sup>16</sup> It is arguably possible that some Royphiles are male. But those who have met each other, from my reading, are female. While there are postings on the MB that are mere web-versions of exclamation marks, it is the more substantial postings that energize a discussion thread.

communities (Matei 410-11). It is possible that some Royphiles would lose interest in being part of the internet community. It is also possible that, should Dupuis stop appearing in films and television, RDO would lose its impetus and rationale for existing.<sup>17</sup> But as I write, 3 more translated articles have been added to the Library. Thus far, RDO is thriving.

**Maria Noëlle Ng ©**

**2004**

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<sup>17</sup> In an exchange viv/RDO informs me that even if Dupuis stops acting, as long as the administrators of RDO are interested, the site will be maintained through archival materials and translations.

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