

Subverting Stereotypes from London, Ontario to Los Angeles, California: A Review and  
Analysis of Paul Haggis's Televisual Oeuvre

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### Abstract

Paul Haggis's recent forays into the feature film milieu have garnered the London, Ontario native widespread critical acclaim. Serving as a co-producer, director, and/or writer for a series of high-profile motion pictures such as *Million Dollar Baby* and *Crash* have propelled Haggis to Hollywood's coveted "A list" of directors and writers. Nonetheless, prior to his entrée into feature filmmaking, Mr. Haggis already enjoyed a highly distinguished career as a creator, producer, and writer in the North American television industry. A two-time Emmy Award recipient, Paul Haggis's television oeuvre encompasses an eclectic array of prime time sitcoms and dramas. Starting out as a writer for situation comedies such as *Facts of Life* and *One Day at a Time*, Mr. Haggis later moved on to create notable dramas including *Due South*, *EZ Streets*, and *Family Law*.

Subversion of widely held stereotypes and showcasing society's myriad moral ambiguities are hallmarks of Haggis's dramatic endeavors in both television and feature films. While the two techniques have helped produce powerful and thought-provoking dramas, on occasion, they also have sparked controversies. This paper examines these "Haggis hallmarks" in *Due South* and *EZ Streets*, two television series Mr. Haggis created back-to-back during the mid-1990's. The paper also examines several controversial aspects of the shows related to Haggis's use of both techniques.

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*A Canadian in the United States*

Until age 21, Paul Edward Haggis spent the winter months working in London, Ontario's local theatre while spending the summer months working with his father's construction company (Teeman, n.d.; E. Dickinson, n.d.). Realizing his unsuitability for the construction trade, Haggis

instead sets his sights on a photography career and enrolls in Art School. However, he later drops out of the program. Influenced by Michelangelo Antonioni's 1996 motion picture *Blow Up*, Paul next moves to London, England where he attempts to launch a career as a fashion photographer. After spending about one year in London without achieving his goal, Paul returns to Canada and attends film school.

While still in his early 20's, Paul decides to relocate to Los Angeles, California to try his fortunes as a television writer. While attempting to gain a foothold in the television business, Haggis works in sundry non-film and television jobs, including as a furniture mover and as an in-store photographer at a Sears department store (Teeman, n.d.).

Paul's first achieves a modicum of success by writing the pilot and ten episodes of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) situation comedy *Hagnin' In*. However, Haggis's first "big break" as a television writer for an U.S.-produced series came about thanks to Norman Lear. In the decade following Lear's hugely popular and socially progressive 1970's comedies *All in the Family*, *Maude*, and *The Jeffersons*, the legendary American director-producer-writer enjoyed continued success with a number of somewhat less provocative situation comedies. Lear, favorably impressed by a script Haggis penned for one of the shows, asks the Canadian join the writing team on several of his other sitcoms. Eventually, Haggis becomes Executive Producer on *Facts of Life* yet another Lear-produced series. However, Haggis's stint as executive producer is short lived since he is fired soon thereafter.

In 1987, Haggis once again assumes the role of producer, this time acting as supervising producer and writer for the comedy/drama *thirtysomething*. Three years later, in 1990, Haggis signs with MTM Productions where he creates the Valerie Harper situation comedy *City*. The series, which portrays a corrupt city hall, is canceled by CBS in June 1990 after 13 episodes.

Despite the show's brief existence, it manages to raise an outcry from some Christian groups over a scene featuring a character seeing a vision of Virgin Mary in her coffee cup.

Controversy once again erupts over a Paul Haggis script when "PS, Your Wife is in Hell", a skit he pens for the *Tracy Ullman Show*, is banned by Fox. The offending skit depicts a man returning from his wife's funeral and the priest who must explain to the husband that he faked last rites. The man's wife is now in Hell (Dickinson, 2003-2005).

*Due South* and *EZ Streets*: Their Short and Traumatic Lives on U.S. Network Primetime Television

*Due South*<sup>1</sup>

In addition to *City* and *The Tracey Ullman Show*, during the late 1980's and early 1990's, also Haggis works as a writer and creative consultant for the legal drama *L.A. Law* and as a director and producer on the short-lived Nell Carter CBS sitcom *You Take the Kids*. During this period, he also creates the Chuck Norris karate-packed modern western *Walker, Texas Ranger*, which debuted on CBS in April 1993.

Meanwhile in Canada at an Alliance-sponsored luncheon in Toronto in 1993, Jeff Saganasky, then CBS Entertainment President delivered a speech where he urged Canadians to become "involved more convincingly in continental co-productions or drama series and TV movies. Answering the challenge, Alliance head Robert Lantos began discussions with Saganasky about possibly producing a series for CBS's prime time schedule with CTV also later joining in on the talks (Quill, 1994). The task of creating this new series fell to Paul Haggis.

Created, produced, and often written by Paul Haggis<sup>2</sup> *Due South* was one of the first Canadian television series to garner a prime time slot on CBS, a "big four" American network (McKay 1997, B7).<sup>3</sup> The series, produced by Alliance Communications, debuted as a telemovie simulcast on CTV in Canada and CBS in the U.S. in April 1994 and was subsequently developed

into an hour-long weekly series for broadcast on those same two networks as part of their 1994/95 television season. Ostensibly set in Chicago, beyond a few obligatory exterior shots of the real Chicago, *Due South* was filmed entirely in Toronto and other Canadian locations with an almost entirely Canadian cast and crew. The series also showcased the music of many Canadian artists and has been likened to *Ally McBeal* in its use of music "as an integral part of the plot".

*Due South's* fish-out-of-water premise featured Benton Fraser (played by Paul Gross), a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) constable from the Northwest Territories who along with Diefenbaker, his deaf, lip-reading wolf, travel to Chicago in search of his father's killers. While there, Benton befriends Chicago police detective Ray Vecchio.

By the end of the two-hour made-for-television pilot, Benton and Ray successfully apprehend the murderers. However, they also discover that Benton's father's murder is tied to a much larger ongoing scandal involving members of the RCMP, Canadian government officials, businessmen and others. Benton's unwelcome disclosure of the scandal results in his permanent transfer, or more aptly, banishment to the Canadian Consulate in Chicago. While attempting to adjust to life in inner city Chicago and working various mundane jobs at the Embassy, Benton spends his spare time helping his newfound friend Ray solve crimes.

This deceptively simple premise belied a complex, multi-layered show that some critics likened to a "Chinese puzzle box". Episodes interwove farcical comedy with film noir. Inside jokes, some Canadian and some American, were cleverly inserted into the dialogue. Visual puns abounded. As one female respondent to a *Due South* audience survey commented, "You could not watch this show on cruise control".

Despite critical acclaim and respectable ratings<sup>4</sup> *Due South's* fortunes were short-lived on American network primetime television. Soon after its debut, Jeff Sagansky, President of

CBS Entertainment and the show's primary supporter departed the network. The loss of the show's patron saint at CBS led to frequent preemptions, schedule shuffles, and episodes aired out of sequence (Phillips 1997, A16; Atherton 1995, P7). *Due South's* cancellation by CBS at the end of the 1994/95 season marked the first of several "neardeath experiences" ("American graffiti Canadian-style," 1995, 12)<sup>5</sup>.

During *Due South's* first season, Paul Haggis served as the show's executive producer. He also wrote or co-wrote, directed, and even made cameo appearances in multiple episodes. Over the course of *Due South's* second season, however, his participation in the series declined markedly.<sup>6</sup> Given the seemingly imminent demise of *Due South* after season two, Paul Haggis along with sundry other members of *Due South's* cast and crew, including Paul Gross<sup>7</sup> and Co-Executive Producer Jeff King<sup>8</sup> began to develop a new television drama, *EZ Streets*. Building upon and extending characterizations, storylines, and themes initially explored in *Due South* and even earlier in *City*, Paul Haggis and his team fashion a far more darker, violent,<sup>9</sup> and morally ambiguous series than any he previously created, produced, or wrote.

### *EZ Streets*

Paul Haggis once again dons multiple hats as creator, director, executive producer, and writer during *EZ Streets* single season of production. Assuming these multiple key production positions affords Haggis extensive creative control over the series. Although stereotypes and the "moral middle ground" were explored to varying degrees in *Due South*, Paul Haggis's early departure from the series abruptly ended this exploratory process. Taking full advantage of his newfound circumstances with *EZ Streets*, Haggis resumes delving into these complex realms.

Set in an unnamed, decaying inner city on the Canadian border eerily reminiscent of Detroit, *EZ Streets* tells the story of three men whose deeply intertwined yet differing lives

continually collide, often violently. Detective Cameron Quinn (Ken Olin), accused of being a cop on the take, searches for the man who killed his partner. Fast-rising Irish mobster Jimmy Murtha (Joe Pantoliano), whom Quinn suspects to be the killer, is busy looking after old friend Danny Rooney (Jason Gedrick) who just spent three years in prison for a crime Murtha committed. Meanwhile, Murtha is also embroiled in a turf war with fellow Irish mobster Michael Dugan over control of the city's derelict alphabet streets which run to the waterfront (Sepinwall, n.d.).<sup>10</sup> In a quest to regain his lost honor and to gather evidence against Murtha, Quinn must act like a dirty cop.

Filmed in Los Angeles with exteriors shot in Chicago and Detroit<sup>11</sup>, *EZ Streets* exudes darkness and despair. Various cinematographic effects underscore the show's dark tone. These include use of obtuse camera angles, shadowing, and bleaching out colors to the point where the viewer invariably believes the episodes are filmed in black and white.

*EZ Streets* two-hour pilot aired October 27, 1996 on CBS and received some of the best reviews of the 1996/1997 television season. "A blood relative of *The Godfather*, *Mean Streets*, *Goodfellas* and *Wiseguy*, *EZ Streets* is nourish and densely plotted and driven by great reams of jazzed dialogue...it's a juicy, twisted crime drama junkie's dream," exclaimed a March 3, 1997 *Salon.com* review of the series (Millman, 1997). A "... thought-provoking portrait of crime, family, broken homes, betrayal, passion, despair and hope," noted one viewer (Brian Jennings, Chicago, 1999). "Gritty, father-son relationship, father-son relationship, loneliness, spirit, mobster, violence, corruption, cold, criminal, redemption, betrayal, sacrifice, power, cynicism, death, morality, complex" are among the many plot keywords listed for *EZ Streets* on *IMDB.com*. All of these emotions and qualities permeated through each episode of the series.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive critical response, *EZ Streets* pilot "...was a stunning ratings bust" (Millman, March 3, 1997). The first episode aired three days later and received similarly dismal ratings. After these two back-to-back poor performances, CBS decided to remove the show from its schedule. Like *Due South*, CBS gave *EZ Streets* another chance in early March 1997. However, the new episodes were aired 'cold' without first rerunning the critical pilot and amid little fanfare (Millman, March 3, 1997). Not surprisingly, the reprieve was short-lived and *EZ Streets* was permanently cancelled in April 1997.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The Due South - EZ Streets Connections*

*EZ Streets* ancestral ties to the *Godfather* and other mob and film noiresque films and television series is readily apparent and important to note. Nonetheless, the show's kinship to *Due South*, although less obvious, is equally significant. A comparison of *Due South* episodes written by Paul Haggis during his tenure on the show with their *EZ Streets* counterparts reveals numerous similarities between the two shows on multiple levels.

*Due South* and *EZ Streets* begin with the death of a close relative and/or friend; Benton Fraser's father in the case of *Due South* and Quinn's partner in *EZ Streets*. In addition, both men despite being killed off very early in their respective pilot episodes remain key characters in the stories. As the plots unfold, we also learn that both murders are tied to far-reaching graft and corruption within the police force and elsewhere in the government. More importantly, these powerful corruptive forces drastically alter both Benton and Quinn's personal and professional lives. For example, Benton Fraser is exiled to a large city in a foreign country while Cameron Quinn suffers "virtual" exile within his own police force because of his obligation to play a "dirty cop". Playing a "dirty cop" proves especially difficult for Quinn since his father was indeed a

"dirty cop" and Quinn had long struggled to overcome the stigma that he was forced to also bear because of his father's transgressions.

In both *Due South* and *EZ Streets*, Paul Haggis uses relationships as the vehicle for exploring stereotypes and moral questions. These relationships come in a variety of forms: father-son, father-daughter, American-Canadian, "criminal"-cop, and cop-cop. Strained familial relationships, especially between fathers and sons, figure prominently in each series as well. In *Due South*, Benton Fraser and Ray Vecchio experience difficult relationships with their individual fathers and their problems remain unresolved at the time of their fathers' deaths. Borrowing a Shakespearean device, the ghosts of Benton's and Ray's fathers make periodic appearances--especially Benton's---to dispense fatherly advice while also allowing for the frank father-son conversations that rightfully should have taken place before death intervened.

*EZ Street's* also boasts its own share of relational difficulties, albeit without supernatural intervention. Cameron Quinn struggles to deal with a father he once admired and respected but later comes to hate after discovering his father's illicit activities. The mobsters in *EZ Streets* also experience troubled relationships. Jimmy Murtha tries to keep his boyhood friend Danny in the gang. Murtha's right hand man Mickey struggles with his gambling addicted father. In addition, several strained male-female relationships are also prominently featured in the series. Danny Rooney attempts to help his drug-addicted, prostitute wife get her life back together. At the same time, he also attempts to form a lasting bond with his young daughter. Meanwhile, Jimmy Murtha and Cameron Quinn vie for the affections of Teresa Connors, Quinn's high school sweetheart and now Murtha's high-powered attorney/lover.

The Use of Stereotypes in *Due South* and *EZ Streets*

*Canadian and American Stereotypes in Due South*

In *Due South*, Paul Haggis highlighted the American - Canadian relationship. Describing his intentions, Haggis stated:

I live to lampoon the things I love, which includes the way we Canadians view ourselves as inferior and yet over-compensate by being more chauvinistic than the Americans. I love turning stereotypes on their heads. To do that, you first set up the stereotype, an archetypal Mountie who descends on Chicago, a fish out of water in big-city USA. Then you have this 'typical' American, Ray Vecchio,..., a Chicago cop who wisecracks to Fraser after they demolish the bad guys, 'We just took out seven guys. One more and you qualify for American citizenship' (P. Haggis quoted in Gefen, 1993, p. C1).

In another interview Haggis commented further:

I think Canadians will like the fact that we're offending Americans, and Americans think we're offending Canadians....That's part of the fun. We're starting a border war, but it's all done with love" (P. Haggis quoted in Quill, September 22, 1994, p. C5).

*Due South* was originally envisioned by executives at Alliance and CBS as a Canadian version of *Crocodile Dundee*. Paul Haggis used this fish-out-of-water concept as a vehicle to comment upon Canadian and American stereotypes as well as the relationship between the two nations (*Due South Chicago Guardian: Season 1 Press Kit, Production Notes* 1997). Describing how he derived the American and Canadian relationship expressed in the show, Haggis explains:

I am a citizen of one country and have lived in the other for 20 years, so I think I always felt like an outsider in both. There was so much I loved about the Americans, but their arrogance and egocentricity didn't make my top ten list. However, I was continually

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amused by the fact that they find it almost impossible to see their own flaws, or consider the possibility that they might be wrong. Canadians on the other hand are handicapped by the fact that they are...well, they're Canadians. Enough said (*Paul Haggis drops by the Due South newsgroup*, 1999).

Haggis used the Mountie and the American cop as representations of each country.

“What I wanted to put in the show was the Mountie that all American[s] believe is all of Canada, and the cop that all Canadians believe is all America -- then have fun with everyone“ (Paul Haggis quoted in Atherton, 1994). Another reason Haggis cited for using a Mountie as the show's central character was to play with the stereotypes that have been traditionally associated with that image. Haggis specifically drew upon *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*, an American-made television show from the 1950s for inspiration:

... I remembered Sgt. Preston and his wonderdog Yukon King, and though -- these guys wouldn't last two seconds in big city USA -- unless everything they thought and said, everything they believed in, truth, honor, compassion, civility, offering a helping hand to your enemy ... what if they all actually worked ... And wouldn't that drive a big city cop just crazy? (*Paul Haggis drops by the Due South newsgroup* 1999).

Canada in *Due South* was often depicted as a pristine, pure, untouched, serene wilderness inhabited by a polite and orderly populace. On the few occasions Toronto was identified as itself, it was portrayed as clean, courteous, friendly, civil, and family-oriented. In contrast to Fraser's civility and gentlemanliness and Canada's bucolic environment, Americans were often portrayed as cynical, impatient, rude, violent, and basically ignorant of their northern neighbors. Ray Vecchio, Fraser's Chicago detective partner, was described as a “cynical, rough-and-tumble, to-hell-with-procedure minion of the law” (Berkowitz, 1998, p. 3E). The show's setting, Chicago,

served as the embodiment of Americans and America --- dirty, dangerous, chaotic, unfriendly, and corrupt.

*"Mobster" Stereotypes in EZ Streets*

While *Due South* relied heavily upon U.S.-Canadian differences, *EZ Streets* paid relatively little attention to the subject despite the fact that the series is set in a city along the U.S.-Canadian border. Among the few re-occurring verbal and or visual references to Canada and/or the border in the series were: 1) the use of red and white lettering for the *EZ Streets* title caption, 2) the location of "Frenchies" casino on the Canadian side of the border, and the 3) occasional visual display of the bridge linking the United States with Canada. One other notable Canada-related facet of the show involved Quinn's father taking up residence in Canada after being forced to retire from the police force for taking bribes. Speaking to his son for the first time in years, Quinn's father explained, "I'm on the other side of the border--nothing can touch me and I don't touch nothin'" (*EZ Streets* pilot).

While paying only minimal attention to U.S.-Canadian differences and stereotypes, *EZ Streets* instead opted to focus upon the "mobster" stereotype. Although *EZ Streets* features Irish rather than Italian mobsters, Jimmy Murtha and Dugan possessed the quintessential traits and accoutrements of their Italian counterparts. Both men owned a restaurant or bar which served as their "hangout"; they each employed a triggerman and other assorted heavies; and also were armed with copious amounts of guns and ammunition. Last but not least, these individuals frequently engaged in gruesome acts of violence and also regularly attended confession.

Tweaking the mobster stereotype slightly, Paul Haggis instilled a moribund comedic quality in several of the mob characters. In addition, he frequently interwove scenes featuring brutality and humor. In these scenes, humor and horror transpired within mere seconds of each

other. A scene depicting a baseball game between dreadlocked Jamaican drug dealers and Jimmy Murtha's gang offers one early example of humor and horror intertwined. Although the game begins on an amusing note, it abruptly ends in a bloody shootout.

A number of scenes featuring Jimmy Murtha and his triggerman Mickey also exude this black comedic quality. For example, the following exchange between Jimmy and Mickey takes place when Mickey reluctantly informs Jimmy of his failure to successfully kill a large potential informant despite shooting him multiple times:

Jimmy Murtha: "I put six bullets in him. You're telling me I didn't kill him?"

Mickey: "It wasn't meant to as a criticism"

Once again, nascent forms of the mobster characters featured on *EZ Streets* can be found in *Due South*. Jimmy Murtha and his gang are reminiscent of the Irish Donnelly gang featured in "Gift of the Wheelman". Also, the reoccurring Frank Zuko character (e.g., "The Deal", "Juliet is Bleeding") although Italian not only resembles Jimmy Murtha in his background and manner. Moreover, Frank Zuko's sister Irene was Ray Vecchio's high school sweetheart a la Theresa Connors and Cameron Quinn.

Humor and violence were also, on occasion, interspersed in *Due South*. In "Gift of the Wheelman" one of the Donnelly gang is killed by fellow gang members for making a mistake during a bank heist. The killing takes place on Christmas Eve, immediately after the now deceased gang member delivers gifts to his associates who in turn, shoot him. Next, Jimmy Donnelly, the gang's leader, asks his associate what gift the dead man brought to them---

Jimmy: See what he got us.

Cameron: Far Side Calendars.

Jimmy: Oh I love those.

*Critical and Audience Reactions to the Stereotypes Used in Due South*

Since *EZ Streets* received relatively little promotion, garnered only a small audience, and aired for only a brief period of time, the stereotypes showcased in the series remained relatively uncontroversial. However, this was not the case with *Due South*. Citing *Due South's* use of distinctively Canadian elements, one television critic wrote, "*Due South* ... will make a career of showing Americans a little Canadian culture" (McCann, 1994, p. F4), while another noted it encouraged a "strong sense of northern Canadian nationalism" (Ostrow, 1994, p. E1). However, some Canadian television critics took issue with the heavy use of Canadian stereotypes in the program. Paul Gross responded to the show's detractors, stating, "It seems the Americans [as portrayed in *Due South*] are usually portrayed as being messy, sloppy, bumbling and ineffective, and we're extraordinarily nice, heroic and capable and efficient." "If we can spread that kind of disinformation about our country south of the border, I think it's fantastic" (P. Gross quoted in McKay, 1997, p. B7).

*Canadian Reactions to Due South*

Although Paul Haggis originally expected protests from Americans concerning their portrayal, he thought that Canadians would understand his intentions and laugh along with him (*Paul Haggis drops by the Due South newsgroup* 1999). On the contrary, Haggis faced a flurry of complaints from Canadian television critics, the RCMP, and even from Canadian schoolchildren over various aspects of the show. Canadian television critics especially took issue with the heavy use of Canadian stereotypes in the program (P. Haggis, interview by the author, November 2000; Adilman 1995, D3). In a November 1999 posting to the *Due South* newsgroup, Haggis recalled, "The Canadians were outraged. The Americans didn't even notice -- or if they did, laughed. Completely the opposite reactions I expected. And the RCMP threatened

to toss me in jail unless I removed a long list of items they found offensive to their image” (*Paul Haggis drops by the Due South newsgroup* 1999). One incensed Canadian critic, Ian Johnston of the *Halifax Daily News*, wrote in the March 20, 1994 issue:

I don't know what's worse; the idea that this silly TV movie got financing from Canada's federal-funding organization Telefilm; the possibility that Alliance canceled its fine series *E.N.G.* to make room for stuff like this crap; or that American viewers are going to have access to this bit of homegrown stereotyping. I expect this type of junk from American producers, but Canadians? Et tu, brute?

Johnston's complaints centered on what he considered being the improbability of the plot and the “clichéd use” of the Canadian Mountie and the American cop.

In a November 2000 interview, Haggis expressed particular dismay with Canadian teachers who had their students write letters accusing *Due South* of showing Canadians as unintelligent. Haggis felt this and other Canadian criticism of the series was unwarranted since he felt the objections were based solely upon a superficial reading of the show (P. Haggis, personal communication, November 2000).

As time went by, criticism against *Due South* waned, albeit never completely vanished, as more Canadian critics and viewers came to accept its premise. Some critics like Greg Quill of the *Toronto Star* who initially panned the show, later changed his mind:

So here's one we got wrong. *Due South*, a Canadian series premiering tonight ... is smart, funny, exciting and utterly engaging. ... It's creator, Canadian Paul Haggis, a Hollywood veteran, and backers Alliance Communications and CTV (CBS is also an investor) have crafted a show that dares play with our perceptions about what TV can and can't do (Quill, 1994, p. C5).

As *Due South* gained popularity in Canada, the RCMP also changed their opinion of the series as they found “it inspired large numbers of young men to try to join the force.” Eventually, the Mounties even “agreed to provide a technical adviser” to the show (Belcher, 1996, p. 4).

A 1999 survey of *Due South* fans from 17 countries worldwide<sup>13</sup> indicated that respondents enjoyed the way American and Canadian stereotypes were lampooned. One Canadian respondent noted that she had avoided watching *Due South* for a while

...because I assumed that the show would make Canadians look stupid - the whole Mountie thing, I guess. Boy was I wrong. Even though they stereotyped Canadians ... I didn't mind. Probably because Fraser was usually right or maybe because it was too funny to take seriously (Anonymous survey respondent, personal communication, 1999).

Most American critics and viewers were apparently unaware of the “kerfluffle” occurring across the border. Instead, many American critics were busily comparing Benton Fraser to everyone from Nelson Eddy, Dudley Do-Right, and Sgt. Preston of the Yukon to Superman, a Boy Scout, and Felix Unger (the latter probably due to Fraser's fastidiousness and personal grooming habits) (Belcher, 1996; Grahnke, 1994; Perigard, 1997). Although American critics often acknowledged that there were jokes in *Due South* that they didn't fully comprehend, overall, they grasped the general concept of the show and understood that the stereotypes used were to be made fun of and not accepted as truth. As Tom Shales noted, Benton Fraser seemed to embody all the most endangered values: decency, honesty, and compassion” (Shales, 1995, p. C5).

#### *Portraying Life in Shades of Grey: The Moral Ambiguities of Due South and EZ Streets*

As discussed above, the use and manipulation of stereotypes is one hallmark of Paul Haggis's television dramas. However, the stereotypes exist in a world rife with myriad moral

ambiguities. Following the advice of a fellow writer, Paul Haggis noted in a March 14, 1995 *New York Times* interview, he began to "... look inside himself for material". As a result of this introspection, he discovered his own "... capacity for both good and ill in life". This led him to further ponder, "Maybe we all like to think that we're heroes interacting with villains--and how do I justify what I do" (Halbinger, 2005, p. B1). Thus, herein lies Paul Haggis's analytical domain of moral dilemmas and shades of gray.

As illustrated in the previous section, Paul Haggis's efforts to bring moral contradictions and dilemmas to the forefront in *Due South* were somewhat encumbered by the prominence of the Mountie stereotype in the show. Many critics and viewers were unable or unwilling to set aside their preconceived notions of *Due South* as an intellectually shallow clone of *Dudley Do Right* or *Crocodile Dundee* owing to its' superficial resemblance to them. However, in retrospect, it would be virtually inconceivable for Dudley Do Right to be lying near death on a train platform as his convicted bank robber/murderer lover flees aboard an outbound train. However, Paul Haggis had no such qualms with placing Benton Fraser in this situation. From Paul Haggis's perspective, even Fraser, the impeccably 'morally upright' Mountie, was liable to experience moral lapses as he did in "Victoria's Secret" nor was he immune from the consequences of his actions. "Victoria's Secret" and a number of other sequences featured in other episodes of the *Due South* were far more akin to a Tennessee Williams play than *Dudley Do Right* or *Crocodile Dundee*.

#### *Morality on the EZ Streets*

With the notable exception of "Victoria's Secret," Benton Fraser and his fellow *Due South's* characters on the whole managed to retain their moral integrity throughout the series. This moral steadfastness, however, did not spill over to *EZ Streets*. The characters, the city, and

everything else in *EZ Streets* exist in a "moral vacuum". The mayor, elected by the populace to eradicate the earlier corrupt administration eventually sells out to the mob. A society of gangsters and rogue cops, among them Quinn's father and his current captain, seemingly still wield considerable influence over the police force in the city. In this murky urban world, saints and sinners become almost indistinguishable from one other.

In *Due South* and in a much larger degree in *EZ Streets*, moral questions are not depicted as being "black and white" but rather as gradations of gray. The psychologically messy questions raised are also inordinately situation-bound. When placed in a situation where a close friend or loved one's life is stake, an individual may take actions he/she previously thought unfathomable. Paul Haggis challenges his audience to think about these and other similar types of questions we often try to avoid. What would you do to save your partner? What sacrifices would you make to save your son's or daughter's life? For example, placed in a seemingly lose-lose situation, even Benton Fraser finally agrees to act as a go-between for laundering stolen money. Duty, loyalty, love, and morality often clash with unpleasant results.

As Cameron's father cautions his son, "We all bend in different ways. Sometimes you bend to make a righteous bust and sometimes you bend because you owe an old friend a favor because he's in trouble and sometimes you bend to save your ass and after a while you can't straighten up anymore. Why don't you go away for a couple of years and come back and see how clean your hands are" (Quinn's father). Within the "shades of gray" world as Haggis depicts, a saint and a sinner live together within every human soul.

Despite *EZ Streets'* inherent moral ambiguities, honor and moral systems still endure with selected actions "... deemed worse than others" (Millman, 1997). For example, the Irish mobster Dugan has no qualms about his participation in illicit drug trafficking yet Murtha considers the

practice repulsive. On the other hand, Murtha considers it perfectly acceptable to ruthlessly kill his opponents, cut off their hands, and store the severed limbs in a freezer. However, he steadfastly refuses to have sex with his lawyer/lover Theresa Connors in a church because he believes it would be sacrilege to do so.

Moral trials and tribulations are not merely limited to the male characters in either *Due South* or *EZ Streets*. Referring to the female characters in *EZ Streets*, Joyce Millman notes that the "... women are crazier, tougher and vindictive than men (Millman, 1997). This statement is equally valid for many of *Due South's* female characters as well. Counted among this group are Victoria Metcalfe in *Due South* as well as Danny Rooney's wife and Theresa Connors in *EZ Streets*.

#### *Conclusion*

*Due South* provided a test bed for Paul Haggis to begin exploring stereotypes and to plumb the "moral middle ground" within a dramatic genre. *EZ Streets* offered him an ideal opportunity to continue these efforts. Looking at the two series in tandem reveals the progressive development and refinement of these two techniques or "Haggis hallmarks" over a period of time.

Nonetheless, venturing into these volatile psychological areas can prove risky. For example, *Due South's* heavy reliance upon Canadian stereotypes, especially Mounties, and the image it evoked of the "frozen North" proved controversial in Canada since the country has long struggled to overcome these stereotypes. Those opposed to *Due South* were concerned with the danger that other countries would interpret the image of the Mountie as standing for everyone in Canada, but for the most part this fear appeared to be unfounded. Most American audience members viewed Benton Fraser as embodying a vanishing breed of humanity who just happened

to come from Canada. Nonetheless, in less capable hands, the kind of stereotype bending that took place on *Due South* may have yielded disastrous results. Fortunately, Paul Haggis and other members of *Due South's* creative team were largely able, through the use of humor and sly admonishments, to educate viewers and prompt Americans and Canadians to see past their assumptions.

With respect to the "moral middle ground," Paul Haggis uses his characters and stories as a means to demonstrate that life is not painted solely in "black and white". It is important for us to acknowledge this fact and to come to terms with it no matter how uneasy it makes us feel. As Cameron's mother advises her son, "Every since you were six, you only drew things in black and white. For years I thought you were color blind...Someday you will learn that you will need different colored crayons" (*EZ Streets* pilot).

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Portions of the *Due South* sections are excerpted from M. A. Tate & V. Allen (November 2000), *Duesers: A Case study of the Due South cyberfandom* and M. A. Tate & V. Allen (2003), Integrating distinctively Canadian elements into television drama: A Formula for success or failure? The *Due South* experience. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 28(1), 67-84.

<sup>2</sup>*Due South*'s origins have been in dispute almost since it began airing. In December 1994, a \$35 million (CDN) lawsuit was filed by three Toronto writers against Alliance (now Alliance Atlantis). The writers allege that the original idea for the show was contained in a movie script they submitted to Alliance in 1991. In late 1995, Alliance filed a \$20 million (CDN) counterclaim against the writers for 'intentional interference with the Alliance Companies' and Robert Lantos' economic and business relations' (quoted in Shecter, 1997, p. 7).

<sup>3</sup>In August-September 1987, six episodes of the Canadian-produced series *Night Heat* were aired in the U.S. during primetime (10 – 11 p.m.) on CBS as an experiment. However, unlike *Due South*, *Night Heat* was originally produced for airing on CBS late night (i.e., 11:30 p.m. or after) rather than primetime (Brooks & Marsh, 1999).

<sup>4</sup>*Due South* tied for 58th (with *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*) out of 142 series in Nielsen's 1994-95 prime-time rankings, making it the highest-rated new CBS program during the fall 1994/95 season (Grahne, December 14, 1995). In Canada, the series drew audiences of as high as 2.1 million viewers, consistently ranking it in the top ten shows in Canada's Nielsen ratings, making it "...the highest-rated television series ever made in Canada" (McKay, January 29, 1997, p. B7; Dalglish, February 13, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>*Due South's* considerable audience ratings in Canada and United States coupled with similar successes in Britain and Germany prompted CTV, Telefilm Canada and broadcasters in Britain and Germany (*Maclean's*, 1995, p. 12) to partially make up the funding shortfall caused by CBS's pullout from the show and enabled Alliance to keep *Due South* in production for a second season. Meanwhile in the United States, a fan group called the Friends of *Due South* organized an Internet-based campaign in Spring 1995 to protest CBS's decision to cancel the show and "lobby the network to put the series back on television" (Shales, 1995, p. C5). In November 1995 following "... a deluge of fan mail and a change in management," CBS reversed its cancellation decision to once again pick up the show beginning in December 1995 and air it during the Friday 8 p.m. (ET) time slot (*Maclean's*, November 27, 1995, p. 12; Grahnke, 1995, p. 57). Following the 1995/96 season, CBS decided to cancel the series a second time.

<sup>6</sup> By the time seasons three and four began production in 1997, "Created by Paul Haggis" remained the lone vestige connecting him with the series. Jeff King and Kathy Slevin replaced Haggis as Executive Producer during season two while Paul Gross and R. B. Carney shared the duties during seasons three and four. Gross also assumed some of the writing duties during the show's last two seasons. Major changes also occurred in front of the camera as David Marciano, the actor who played Detective Ray Vecchio, was replaced with Callum Keith Rennie, who joined the cast as Detective Stanley Kowalski.

In public statements, Paul Haggis attributed his removal from *Due South* to the fact that he "... was too expensive" to keep on the payroll following CBS's pullout from the series. However, growing tensions among various cast and crewmembers namely, Robert Lantos, Paul Gross, Paul Haggis, and David Marciano also likely significantly influenced these decisions. Evidence of internal discord with the show surfaced in 1997 when Paul Haggis filed a breach of

contract lawsuit against Alliance Communications claiming he had an oral contract to be a consultant for the third season of *Due South*. The suit was later settled out of court although details of the settlement were not publicly available.

Following Paul Haggis's departure, the look and feel of *Due South* changed dramatically. *Due South* once again reached American audiences via first-run syndication in the United States during the 1997/98 season albeit the show was largely relegated to late-night time slots and received little promotion. As of January 1999 had been syndicated in 149 territories worldwide including the United States<sup>4</sup> ("World Travelers," 1999). In early 1998, following the completion of 67 episodes, *Due South* permanently ceased production (McLeod, 1999).

<sup>7</sup>While *EZ Streets* was still in development, *Due South* unexpectedly received yet another resurrection. This turn of events led Paul Gross--originally slated to play one of the lead roles in the new series--to withdraw from the project and return to *Due South* as both its star and also to take over duties as Executive Producer.

<sup>8</sup>The *EZ Streets* production team included a number of individuals previously associated with *Due South* and/or members of Paul Haggis's family including his father Ted and his wife Deborah Rennard. These individuals comprised the core element of Paul Haggis Productions, based in Los Angeles. Meanwhile, many of the *Due South* crewmembers who returned to Toronto to produce seasons three and four of the show eventually joined Whizbang Productions, a Toronto-based company co-founded by Paul Gross and Frank Sirascusa in 1999.

<sup>9</sup>Although the amount and intensity of violence portrayed on *Due South* seemed to be minimal, the program still managed to be cited in the UCLA's annual television violence study. However, the violent acts on *EZ Streets* were far more graphic and intense than those depicted on *Due South*.

<sup>10</sup> The show's title *EZ Streets* is derived from the "alphabet" (i.e., E - Z) streets which run down to the city's waterfront.

<sup>11</sup> During the early stages of *EZ Streets* development, Paul Haggis intended on splitting the filming of each episode between Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan. This idea was later put aside due to logistical and other concerns.

<sup>12</sup> New episodes of *EZ Streets* aired on March 3rd and March 5th 1997. The show's regularly aired Wednesdays at 10 p.m. (EST). Also, rather than featuring stand-alone plots, *EZ Streets* story lines extended throughout all of the episodes. Therefore, the series required attentive and conscientious viewing. Unfortunately, this philosophy contradicted the basic tenets of primetime network television wherein a) the programming must be entertaining but not thought provoking; and b) must quickly garner a large audience. As a result, *EZ Streets* lifespan on network television proved to be even more abbreviated and traumatic than *Due South's*.

<sup>13</sup> M. A. Tate & V. Allen (November 2000), *Duesers: A Case study of the Due South cyberfandom*. Available from <http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/m/a/mat1/Duesersrevfinal1.html>

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## Appendix A

### *Paul Haggis Film and Television Credits*

#### **Television**

1975: *One Day at a Time*

- Writer

1977: *The Love Boat*

- Writer

1978: *Diff'rent Strokes*

- Writer

1981: *Mr. Merlin*

- Writer (Episode "An Absence of Amulets")

1984-1986: *The Facts of Life*

- Producer
- Writer

1986: *Charmed Lives*

- Writer (pilot episode)

1986: *L.A. Law* (NBC)

- Writer (Multiple episodes)
  - "Silence is Golden" (story)
  - "Finish Line"
  - "How am I Driving"
  - "Whistle Stop"
- Co-writer (Episode "Silence is Golden")
- Creative Consultant (1993-1994)

1987: *The Return of the Shaggy Dog* (Made-for-television movie)

- Writer

1987: *Sweet Surrender*

1987: *The Tracey Ullman Show*

- Writer

1987-1988: *thirtysomething* (ABC)

- Director
- Supervising Producer
- Writer (Multiple episodes)

1990: *City* (CBS)

- Creator
- Executive Producer
- Writer (Pilot and multiple episodes)

1990: *You Take the Kids*

- Director (Pilot)
- Executive Producer

1993: *Walker: Texas Ranger* (CBS)

- Co-Creator

1994-1995: *Due South* (CBS & later first-run syndication)

- Creator
- Director (Episode Victoria's Secret and multiple episodes)
- Executive Consultant
- Executive Producer
- Writer (Pilot; Multiple episodes)
  - "Bird in the Hand"
  - "Chicago Holiday" (parts 1 & 2)
  - "Free Willie"
  - "Gift of the Wheelman"
  - "Hawk and a Handsaw"
  - "An Invitation to Romance"
  - "Manhunt"
  - Vault
  - Victoria's Secret

1996-1997: *EZ Streets* (CBS) (Produced by Paul Haggis Productions)

- Creator
- Director (Pilot and Episodes)
- Executive Producer
- Writer (Pilot and all episodes)
- 1997, composer Mark Isham won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Main Title Theme

1997: *Michael Hayes* (CBS)

- Series developer
- Executive Producer
- Writer (Pilot and multiple episodes)

1998: *Ghost of a Chance*

- Director
- Executive Producer
- Writer

1999: *Family Law* (CBS)

- Director (Pilot and multiple episodes)
- Executive Producer
- Writer

2003: *Mister Sterling*

- Writer (Multiple episodes)

## **Feature Films**

1993: *Red Hot*

- Director
- Writer

2004: *Crash*

- Director
- Producer
- Writer (Screenplay)

2004: *Million Dollar Baby*

- Co-Producer
- Writer (Screenplay)
  - Adaptation of *Rope Burns*, a collection of short stories); Co-Producer

2006: *Flags of Our Fathers*

- Writer (Screenplay)

2006: *Honeymoon with Harry* (Pre-production)

- Director
- Writer (Screenplay)

2006: *The Last Kiss* (Filming)

- Writer (Screenplay)