

REVIEWS

Jean-Claude Labrecque's **Les années de rêve**

The remembrance of things past, wrote Proust, incarnates itself in hidden objects. The secret is to discover the right object. In his fourth feature, *Les années de rêve*, Quebec director Jean-Claude Labrecque does discover that object, but at the sacrifice of most of the film itself.

For the object in question is neither the dreams of the title (the first two-thirds of the film), nor the revolt of the original working title (*Années de rêve et de révolte*), nor even the documentary (visual and musical) reconstruction of the years between 1964-1970 that embody much of the film. Rather it is something much, much more intangible – and far more important – namely, the dawn of modern filmic fiction itself (as the nightmare of memory's inability to remember) which Labrecque discovers almost in desperation during the film's final minutes in a sequence of cinematic breakthrough of the utmost moment for the future of Quebec filmmaking.

In a rare, marvelous flash of filmic illumination, *Les années de rêve* liberates itself from the bonds of its crippling realism and discovers the surrealism of the modern imagination. Here at last is the October Crisis on film in an authentic moment of the historical imagination, not as mere actuality footage, not as reconstruction limping on the crutches of drama, but as nightmare. In a blue haze of night and fog, of civilians entrapped by lumbering army trucks, of city streets through which stalk a repressive infinity of soldiery, of haunting ancestral voices of reproach and recrimination, and at the centre of it, imprisoned in his car, the feverish Louis Pelletier (Gilbert Sicotte) finally grasps the spectacle of (his own) history in all its naked brutality. Yet while he is completely overcome by events, reduced to a terrorized creature surpassed in his understanding, he remains in his very bewilderment a human being nonetheless. In this all-too brief, but extraordinary moment of breakdown in which the disarray of the protagonist is entirely captured within the cinematic imagination, Quebec film transcends itself – only to fall back from that summit utterly exhausted.

Années de rêve's unexpected, fortuitous discovery of its own epic project has two immediate consequences. Forward-looking, it unveils an entire cinematic continent, the limitless possibilities for an authentic Québécois cinema that has broken through to the imaginative possession of its own fear. Backward-looking, this discovery annuls that dependence on the documentary that has subtended so much Québécois feature filmmaking, not the least being the bulk of Labrecque's own features, with the qualified exception of *Les Vautours* (which fictionally internalizes the documentary).

Unfortunately *Années de rêve's* own conclusion devastates the film itself.

Only in a rather loose sense is *Années de rêve* a sequel to *Les Vautours*, which

terminates in 1959. Chronologically, the story of Louis Pelletier resumes from 1964-70, with cameo appearance throughout by the aunts of *Les Vautours* (Monique Mercure, Carmen Tremblay and Amulette Garneau). During one hilarious family get-together veteran actor Roger Lebel delivers a comic performance that is simply staggering. But the real focus of *Années de rêve* has broadened from the stifling intimacy of Quebec City to metropolitan life in Montreal and from the family to the marriage between Louis and Claudette (Anne-Marie Provencher).

Much of *Années de rêve* is a kind of medley of overlapping dreams, each one as vague as the next. There's the dream of personal happiness of Louis and Claudette, little developed outside of sex. There's Louis' indistinct dream of no longer having bosses to work for, a dream which leads him into syndicalist dabblings. There are the dreams of the '60s, articulated musically by the soundtrack (The Beatles, Bob Dylan, and Robert Charlebois), and the peace & love dreams mouthed by Louis' pot-smoking American cousin John-John (John Wildman). And finally there are the various Quebec dreams of social justice and national independence as signified by the letters FLQ on a wall; RIN posters, and above all by De Gaulle's 1967 "Vive le Québec libre" visit to Montreal as recorded in documentary form by Labrecque himself.

But one by one the dreams go bad.

Claudette discovers child-rearing, housekeeping and feminism; the Yippies are bludgeoned by the Chicago pigs; De Gaulle is just an old man reliving the 1944 Liberation of France in a private delirium of memory; and Louis himself spirals downward into violent agitation in the taxi business and dynamite thefts for the kiddies of the FLQ. After the Cross kidnapping, Louis on the run telephones Claudette that he has hidden blasting caps in the house; as she is about to get rid of the package she is interrupted by a phone call and their son opens the package instead. The film literally explodes as Louis and Claudette rush their mangled boy to the hospital only to drive right into the Canadian army's October 1970 invasion of Quebec.

Yet it is only in that final sequence that *Années de rêve* truly achieves anything of the epic scope that the film calls for. And if that scene works so successfully, it is because Labrecque has made October '70 the purely imaginative décor for his characters. Otherwise the documentary inserts – De Gaulle, Chicago '68, the Murray Hill garage riot – simply push the characters out of the film. This is strikingly evident in one scene where John-John and Louis are still drinking and smoking hours after De Gaulle's speech from the balcony of Montreal City Hall. They are utterly alone, surrounded by the detritus of RIN placards; mere bit players on History's empty stage. Contrary to their intention, the

documentary passages reduce the characters instead of enhancing them or their story. They are merely dissolved into the purely anonymous, a dissolution which, while it may be central to the documentary, is anathema to fiction. If Labrecque's documentary eye reduces a De Gaulle to an almost senile old man or a lesser historical personnage like Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau to a bewildered figure rolling his eyes in utter bafflement before France's great man, the fate of minor, non-historical folk like Louis and Claudette is simply to be repressed into utter insignificance beneath the documentary's crushing claim to represent reality.

If *Années de rêve* is then an uneasy tapestry of clashing modes of representation, there are nonetheless glimmers of possible stories that would be worth pursuing separately. For instance, Labrecque could make a fascinating contemporary documentary out of all his De Gaulle material. Or a feature film that would solely concentrate on the theme of the would-be revolutionary in the Montreal of the '60s and '70s, with its informers, its corrupt political police, all of which are glimpsed in *Années de rêve* but too scattered to achieve a powerful whole.

And yet both *Années de rêve's* one outstanding scene and at the same time the cause of the film's overall undoing can be attributed to the film's ambition. If the film simply tries to do too much, it does nevertheless manage to point a way out of the dilemma. *Années de rêve*, somewhat like Quebec's own discovery of its modernity in the early '60s, breaks through its own heavy, filmic traditions, to the bright light of the contemporary fictional imagination. And surely a glimpse of that is sufficient cause for triumph.

Michael Dorland ●

● Gilbert Sicotte and John Wildman share a joint on history's empty stage in *Années de rêve*



LES ANNÉES DE RÊVE d. Jean-Claude Labrecque p. Claude Bonin, François Labonté admin. Cine II 82 Itée, Charles Ohayon p. man. Daniel Louis unit man. Mario Nadeau p. sec. Micheline Cadieux p. acct. Muriel Lize-Pothier 1st a.d. René Pothier 2nd a.d. Luce Richard cont. Claudette Messier sc. Robert Gurik, with Marie Laberge art d. Vianney Gauthier props. Daniel Huysmans props. buyer Jean Kazemirchuk cost. des. François Laplante cost. Suzanne Harel asst. cost. Jacqueline Rousseau dresser Mario Davignon makeup Kathryn Casault asst. make-up Nicole Lapiere hair Thomas Booth asst. hair Bob Pritchett, Rosalind Laveman period vehicles Retro-mobile inc. d.o.p. Alain Dostie 1st asst. cam. Daniel Jobin 2nd asst. cam. Nathalie Moliavko-Visotzky stills Warren Lipton gaffer Daniel Chrétien best boy Claude Fortier key grip Marc De Ernsted crane Robert Lapiere grips Michel Périard, Pierre Guevremont, Marjolaine Page sd. Serge Beauchemin boom Yvon Benoit, Marcel Fraser p. assts. Luc Martineau, Geoff Bowie, Bruno Bazin (Québec) trainee Jérôme Labrecque ed. François Labonté asst. ed. Louise Blais sd. concept. Marcel Pothier sd. ed. Viateur Paiement, Louise Blais asst. sd. ed. Jocelyn Caron sd. efx. Marcel Pothier, Viateur Paiement mixer Michel Descombes asst. mixer André Gagnon titles Gérard Paquin l.p. Anne-Marie Provencher, Gilbert Sicotte, Alexandre Guertin-Aird, Guillaume Lemay-Thivierge, Monique Mercure, Amulette Garneau, Jean Mathieu, John Wildman, Carmen Tremblay, Roger Lebel, Claude Laroche, Yves Desgagnés, Septimiu Sever, Monique Joly, Marie Laberge, Josée Labossière, Philippe Robert, Yves Allaire, Jean-Guy Bouchard, Lothaire Bluteau, Vallier Dumont, Jean-Pierre Saulnier, Jean-Pierre Matte, Jose Rettino, Mathieu Léger, Judith Gruber-Stitzer, Julien Poulin, André Vezina, Ronald France, Rejean Gauvin, Claude-Jean Devirieux, Robert Desbiens unit pub. Danielle Papineau-Couture (514) 842-3851 colour 35mm running time 90 min. p.c. Les Films Vision 4 inc.