

Fernand Bélanger & Dagmar Gueissaz Teufel's
Passiflora

Fernand Bélanger and Dagmar Gueissaz-Teufel's new NFB French-language feature *Passiflora*, makes the official CBC record of the Pope's Montreal visit seem like a cup of warm milk. *Passiflora*'s name refers to the passion-flower, a tropical plant with tranquilizing and anaesthetic properties whose parts were believed to resemble the crown of thorns, nails and other instruments of Christ's passion. A truly dazzling, kinetic work, *Passiflora* uses documentary footage, fiction, graffiti, song and animation, of both Michael Jackson's and the Pope's simultaneous visits to Montreal to present a mordant critique of both the prevalence and selectivity of the media.

The film is structured chronologically, beginning with the Pope's arrival in Montreal and ending after his departure with a helicopter shot of a wrecking crew demolishing the altar where he's just finished giving mass. In between, the directors intercut media coverage of the Pope with fictional episodes in the lives of gays, women undergoing abortions, battered women, and other marginals deemed not to exist for the duration of the visiting celebrities sojourn.

The Pope's visit and that of Michael Jackson actually took place several days apart. In *Passiflora*, however, in order to better compare the effect that their presence, and the way that presence was reported by the media, had on the city, the events take place within 24 hours of each other.

For the time they were in Montreal, both stars monopolized the media: the film shows the hundreds of journalists who jammed both events trying to get coverage. *Passiflora* also depicts how the police, the military and various figures of authority (such as Jackson's manager and his press relations people) directed the event, telling the press what they could cover, when and from what angle. Stars, press and public are all shown as manipulated into creating an event, playing a part, and helping to shape the way other people perceive it.

Gueissaz-Teufel and Bélanger poke irreverent fun at cultural icons. At the beginning of the movie, an anarchist emblem unwinds into an animated snake. This biblical symbol of the source of eternal damnation then proceeds to joyously dance through *Passiflora*, flouting the immaculate image of rectitude that Christ's earthly representative presents. In another scene, two men sitting on a table at a gay dance begin to kiss while stern images of the Pope are broadcast from a TV between their bodies. This kind of ribald, almost bawdy humour, contributes to a critique that is as funny as it is caustic.

Perhaps because of copyright laws,

Jackson plays a minimal role in the film. The footage of the technology involved in his show and that of the masses waiting outside the Olympic Stadium to see him, is only used to point out how similar such a 'profane' spectacle is to the supposedly sacred one.

On the other hand, the Pope is omnipresent, his image used as a recurring motif that links the several, mostly unconnected, fictional episodes.

Passiflora also contrasts the city as officialdom presented it to the world and as the filmmakers see it. Anti-cruise demonstrations, the 'danse des tapettes' (a gay dance that used the Pope's visit as a theme), a transvestite and a battered woman walking the street at night trying to get help — all are juxtaposed with the controlled festivities surrounding Jackson and the Pope. For example, near the end of the film a strip-joint had been made to cover up its facade so as not to offend. His Holiness when he passed by (and, needless to say, so that it wouldn't be picked up by the cameras broadcasting the parade around the world).

Partly because of quick editing and partly because the direction is often inspired, *Passiflora* has a hallucinatory, anarchic rhythm that sometimes borders on the surreal. In one scene the same gay couple are once more shown kissing, this time before an ugly new federal building. Two adolescents are tap-dancing in the background. A man in a three-piece suit comes up to one of the gay men and asks him if he realizes that he's kissing another man. When the gay man responds positively, the man in the suit can't get over it. He keeps asking passersby: "Did you see that! They were kissing each other!" The man finally goes up to the tap-dancers who respectfully stop dancing, listen, smile, and then resume tapping.

If anarchy is one of the film's qualities, it also creates problems. Scenes shift from the Pope saying mass, to two

men relieving themselves in front of the stadium, to a woman berating a young man protesting the Pope. These juxtapositions undoubtedly contribute to creating this varied, textured, portrait of officially unacknowledged lives. However, the various narrative threads often get frayed in the process.

Gueissaz-Teufel and Bélanger use sound innovatively. While original sound is used for the fictional episodes, they've experimented with a fictive dubbing in their documentary footage, challenging notions of "objectivity" and "realism" as applied to the documentary. The filmmakers have also tried mixing different tones and volumes in order to manipulate space. Though this sometimes makes the dialogue unintelligible, for the most part it enriches the film, imbuing it with greater depth.

Passiflora may not be entirely successful, but parts of it are simply brilliant. In concept and form, it's much more daring than any other Québécois film I've seen recently. I have a feeling that *Passiflora* will continue to be talked about long after the awards being given to some other films have turned to dust.

José Arroyo •

PASSIFLORA d. Fernand Bélanger and Dagmar Gueissaz-Teufel **participating filmmakers** Bernard Gosselin, Jacques Leduc, Yves Dion, François Beauchemin, Ester Auger, Diane Carrière, Yves Angrignon, François Aubry, Jacques Avoine, Pierre Bernier, Pascale Bilodeau, Séraphin Bouchard, Serge Bouthillier, Claude Brasseur, Michael Cleary, Norma Denys, Susan Gourley, François Gosselin, Pierre Landry, Guy Lamontagne, Normand Lecuyer, Raymond Marcoux, Jean-Guy Normandin, Guy Rémillard, Yves Roy, John W. Sawyer, Gilles Tremblay, François Vincelette, Suzanne Walsh, and the Lab friends, **admin.** Jacqueline Rivest, Laurence Paré, Joanne Carrière, Gaëtan Martel, Carol Smith **tech.coord.** Edouard Davidovici **mix.** Hans Peter Strobl, Adrian Croll **sd.ed.** Christian Marcotte **film concept** Maurice Bulbulian **p.** Jacques Vallée **p.c.** National Film Board. Col., 35mm, Dolby sound **running time:** 90 mins.

Michel Moreau's
Le Million tout-puissant

Michel Moreau's entertaining documentary, *Le Million Tout-Puissant*, ask the questions all lottery-ticket buyers dream about: Does winning a million turn dreams into reality? What does it mean to become an overnight millionaire? Are loto-millionaires happier? What do they become? What are their fears, if any?

Using a direct cinema style, Moreau interviews three million-dollar winners of the lottery. The first, a suburban housewife, addresses the director in a self-assured manner. She makes it clear she was always a happy person. And her life hasn't changed much, except, of course, that instead of the normal one vacation per year, she can now have up to six; and instead of the one family car, her family now owns five — one for each member.

A two-time winner of the million lottery in nine months, Pierre Cassault offers a different insight. After recovering from severe depression following his second win, he realized his dream of becoming a businessman. Unlike Mrs. Laxton, the housewife, he is modest with his vacations, and instead preferred to open a gourmet restaurant.

On the other hand, the third winner, Mr. Brault, became a victim of forces beyond his control. He was laid off from his job because his boss could no longer tolerate his bragging and shenanigans. We only see Brault in photos, as he preferred not to be interviewed. His parents, however, were eager to speak to the director. They let us know that although their life hasn't changed all that much, they now have many new friends and an endless list of consumer goods. One of their new acquisitions include a CB radio, with which the Brault parents can talk to each other all-day long.

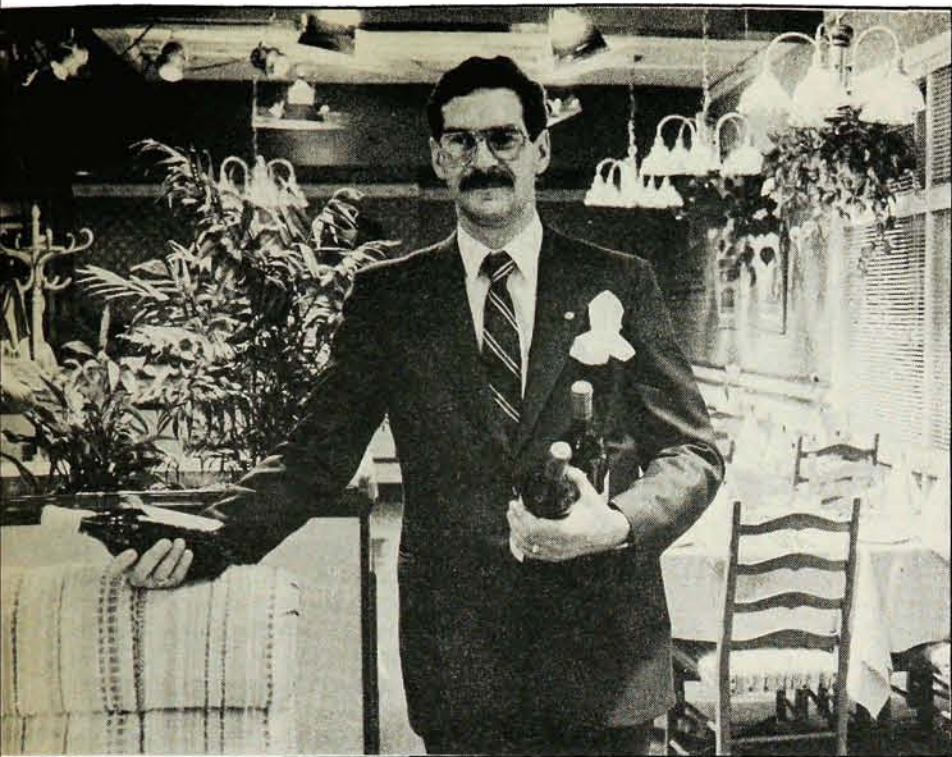
In this film, Moreau ingeniously explores the psycho-social phenomena of Quebec lotteries. Intercut with the interviews are the characters of Jeremy, an imaginary loto-millionaire, and his friend Paolo, a balloon vender. The narrative of Jeremy and Paolo is a humorous, philosophical discourse on the pros and cons of becoming an instant millionaire. In the midst of all this, Jean-Guy Moreau, Quebec's renowned storyteller, gives a brilliant performance in a diversity of roles.

The film opens with Jean-Guy Moreau as a secret agent, a cross between James Bond and Inspector Clouseau, attired in matching red and white checkered hat, gloves, tie and briefcase. His assignment? To investigate Quebec's mammoth lotteries.

Casting Jean-Guy Moreau in the role of agent serves a dual purpose. First, it moves the film forward by means of a conventional narrative. Secondly, through the documentary technique of



• *Passiflora*: a vision of the image civilization's detritus



• Pierre Casault, just a simple millionaire twice over

voice-over, the agent reports his investigations in a factual, journalistic style which allow the film to reveal to the audience the mechanisms of the Quebec lotteries.

With Jeremy, the imaginary loto-millionaire, and his friend Paolo (played by Gilbert Sicotte and Pierre Curzi), we delve further into the dreams and fears that attend becoming an instant millionaire. Michel Moreau uses this dramatization of documentary elements to highlight the paranoia – and megalomania – of people with money. After Jeremy's anxieties of being rich have been allayed, we find him and Paolo in Bacchanalian decadence in a Roman bath complete with champagne, food and servants. Yet Jeremy still asks Paolo if he is truly his friend or is it only because of the money.

The Jeremy and Paolo scenes take place against an original music score by Maxime Dubois, a young graduate of the Conservatoire de Musique de Québec, whose subtle, carnival-like melody is pleasing to the ear and appropriate to the film's theme, the fantasies and wishful dreams of the make-believe world.

Meanwhile, our secret agent, among

other findings, reports that in Quebec, \$800 million worth of loto tickets are sold each year, and that 92% of the population buys loto tickets on a regular basis.

Even if the film is partially funded by the Quebec government lottery corporation, Michel Moreau presents an even-handed view of money fever. At the end of the film, using the Brechtian device of having Jean-Guy Moreau impersonate Gilles Vigneault, Felix Leclerc and Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau in a sing-song commentary, the magical values we place on the almighty dollar are exposed.

Le Million tout-puissant concludes with a case-study of a Newfoundland man who won a million and then died within the year. By including this documentary footage, Moreau penetrates the difference between fact and daydreams.

Thoroughly amusing yet thoughtful, **Le Million** leaves the viewer with the serious thought that people need myths as a means... of living vicariously.

Nicolina Sindici •

Pierre Falardeau & Julien Poulin's

Elvis Gratton – Le King des kings

Generally panned by the Quebec media and, of course, ignored by the rest of Canada, **Elvis Gratton – Le King des kings** is, for that reason, all the more a brilliant feature-length parody on Quebec and Canadian culture by that extremely talented duo, Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin.

A garage-owner in a suburb south of Montreal, Robert Gratton (played to hysterical perfection by Julien Poulin) decides to enter an Elvis Presley-look-alike contest. He wins – plus a trip south to the Island of Santa Banana. And off he goes with his wife Linda (played with wit and charm by Denise Mercier)

and his Expo baseball tapes. Santa Banana is your average, only slightly exaggerated banana republic crawling with military observers. Upon his return, burnt to a crisp, Gratton serves up a truly Canadian Christmas party complete with German beer-garden, barbecue, and live band on a raft wearing Hawaiian shirts and grass skirts. (Canada is, after all, a multicultural country.) Needless to say Gratton is a practicing Catholic and wants his garage decorated with a first-rate Christmas manger – (you know, Jesus, Mary, Joseph and some cows). Elvis Gratton is no run-of-the-mill Québécois, and his Nativity pageant won't be ordinary either: the Holy Family, including the infant Jesus and the Wise Men, all have Elvis Presley faces. The laughter from the audience was so loud at this revelation that the theatre-manager rushed in fearing a riot.

Most critics picked up on the flawed construction of the film. Falardeau makes no excuses for this, nor does he try to hide it. He simply took pieces of tape and spliced the two previously-made 30-minute segments together for an instant feature. "What do you expect" asks Falardeau, "with a less than half-a-million dollars and a shooting schedule of 22 days?"

The first segment of **Elvis Gratton – Le King des kings** entitled simply **Elvis Gratton** won the Grand Prize at the 1982 Lille Festival in France and Best Short-Feature at the Festivals of Festivals in Toronto the same year. Falardeau wanted to make a feature, but with cash-flow problems had to think shoestring-creative. The solution? Shoot the final segment (the swimming pool segment and Nativity scene) and add it to the first two portions. The result? A first-rate, flawed, but subversive stroke of high comedy.

Neil Wilson •

Elvis Gratton – Le King des Kings d./sc. Elvis Falardeau, Elvis Poulin p. Elvis Payeur eds. Elvis Falardeau, Elvis Poulin sd.eds. Elvis Falardeau, Elvis Poulin, Elvis Leroux p.man. Elvis Payeur, Elvis Richard d.o.p. Elvis Dostie art d. Elvis Lord, Elvis Laplante sd. Elvis Beauchemin, Elvis Auger 1st ad. Elvis Pothier, Elvis W. Benoit 2nd ad. Elvis Didelot asst.cam. Elvis Jobin boom Elvis Charron, Elvis Chartrand cont. Elvis Régent, Elvis Lachapelle cont.trainee Elvis Fayas propsmen Elvis Huysmans, Elvis Forest, Elvis Ducas, Elvis Lavoie, Elvis Baril, Elvis Chaput, Elvis Singher. Set dec.trainees Elvis Corbo, Elvis Gosselin, Elvis Méthé make-up Elvis Trépanier, Elvis Migneault asst.make-up Elvis Lapierre cost.des. Elvis Prigent, Elvis Sauriol, Elvis Laplante dressers Elvis Guernon, Elvis Harel, Elvis Carter key grips Elvis Paquet, Elvis Chrétien, Elvis Berrie grips Elvis Amyot, Elvis Courteau, Elvis Guillard, Elvis Hassib, Elvis Mayot best boy Elvis Lépine gaffers Elvis Arsenau, Elvis Lafleur stills Elvis Valiquet, Elvis Boucher, Elvis Charlebois p.coord. Elvis Hilaréguy, Elvis Castellino p.admin. Elvis Maltais, Elvis Darveau p.acct. Elvis Lizé-Pothier unit man. Claude Cartier asst.unit man. Elvis Martineau, Elvis Vincent p.assts. Elvis Décarie, Elvis Boulianne, Elvis Guillard, Elvis Pellerin labs & studios Bellevue Pathé Québec (1972) Inc., Negbec Inc., Dusson Synkro mixers Elvis Charron, Elvis Blondeau titles Elvis Eykel, Elvis Laroche opticals Film Optical (Québec) Ltée songs "Teddy Bear" (Glady's music), Aaron King: "Love me tender" (Elvis Presley music), Aaron King: "Memphis Tennessee" (arc music), Aaron King: "Clawdy Miss Clawdy" (arc music), Aaron King: "That's the touch of a king", "Let's go on move", composed by Aaron King: mus. Elvis Picotte, Elvis Plouffe, Elvis Lavigne, Elvis Ménard voice Monique King sd.studio Jean Sauvageau, tnx. L'Office National du Film du Canada, Le Conseil Québécois des Arts du Canada, L'Administration de l'Aéroport Mirabel, L'Administration de Doanes Canada, Le Salon de Coiffure "Interbeauté", Les Fourrures Grizzly, Le Club des Raquettes, La Discothèque Célébrités, CKAC, CJMS, Carl Valiquet, Le Collège Jean-de-la-Mennais, La Fanfare "La Brigade de Terrebonne", Foyer Universel Inc., Les Vins Angrès p.c. L'Association Coopérative de Productions Audio-Visuelles. With the financial participation of: La Société Générale du Cinéma du Québec, Téléfilm Canada, La Société Radio-Québec, La Société Radio-Canada, Bellevue Pathé Québec (1972) Inc., Provilifms Inc., I.p. Bob Gratton, Elvis Poulin, Linda Gratton, Elvis Mercier, Elvis Dufour, Elvis Falardeau, Elvis Fortin, Elvis Girard, the Elvis Beaudoin brothers-in-law, Elvis Regimbald, Elvis Blais, Elvis Houle, Elvis Burette, Elvis Bédard et Elvis Smith, Elvis Allaire, Elvis Simard, Elvis Lalumière, Elvis Auclair, Elvis Tremblay, Elvis McDuff, Elvis Wong, Elvis Lai, Elvis Tord, Elvis Pothier, Elvis Pouplot, Elvis Defruscia, Elvis Poitras, Elvis Duburre, Elvis Gadri Dualo, Elvis Marcellin, Messrs. Elvis Rodriguez, father and son, Elvis Barbe, Elvis Fortin, Elvis Bédard, Elvis Voizard, Elvis Alvaro, Elvis Bouchard, Elvis Morin, Elvis Lapointe, Elvis Chen, Elvis Rathbone, Elvis Venne, Elvis Boyer, Elvis Legault, Elvis O'Hara, Elvis Régnier.

• Pop hero Elvis Gratton brilliantly portrayed by Julien Poulin

