

Francis Mankiewicz's Les Portes Tournantes

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow
from *The Hollow Men*, by T. S. Eliot

It is in this nether region of hollowness, where distant characters reach to each other over the emptiness of lost time, that *Les Portes tournantes* (The Revolving Doors) weaves a complex double story featuring two points-of-view; all of it to the sweet, melancholy beat of a ragtime piano.

The film, directed by Francis Mankiewicz from the novel of the same name by Acadian writer Jacques Savoie (who also wrote the screenplay here), tells two tales. One, set in the present, is seen through the eyes of young Antoine (played by François Méthé), and concerns his relationship with his father, painter Blaudel (played by Gabriel Arcand) and, to a lesser extent, with his mother Lauda (played by French actress Miou-Miou). One day Blaudel receives a mysterious box full of life-time mementos and a handwritten journal. It is from his long-lost mother, and in the journal, she recalls her life.

This half of the story (happening way back then), shot and rendered in a totally different style from the first half (happening now) of the movie, recounts in her own words the strange twists and turns of fate that marked the life of Céleste (Blaudel's mother, played by Monique Spaziani) and seeks to explain to her only son the reasons why she abandoned him to be raised by his paternal grandparents.

The cinematography is particularly stunning when dealing with the past. As a visual parallel of Céleste's own idealisation of her early years, the mind's planing down of the rough edges through the distance of hindsight, everything is shot as if in a golden gauze: the richness of the era costumes, the painstakingly accurate sets, the highly stylized photography (by Thomas Vamos) all create a magic world. The music, by noted Ottawa-born composer François Dompierre, takes us back to those years of silent Hollywood films and bigger-than-life Stars, with young Céleste playing accompanying piano to a packed house of moviegoers, come to listen to her as much as to see the latest film.

In contrast, Antoine's story is set in real time in true colour. For some reason his father Blaudel, a man already marked by a cold and distant personality, becomes even more so as he sits engrossed in the mysterious journal. Antoine wanders between his father's live-in studio and visits to his mother Lauda (a thoroughly modern nuclear-family arrange-



Slumming it in Campbelltown is Monique Spaziani as Céleste, ragtime pianist and self-styled diva

ment, his parents are separated), ever searching to understand what's happening to his father. When he discovers that he has a lost grandmother, one neither he nor even his father has ever met, he is moved to take off on his own and ride the rail to New York City where he hopes to find her: though he doesn't have an address, just an old faded photograph on a handbill of the young woman that she used to be.

The problems with this film stem from the difficulties of transferring such a complex story-line and subtle symbolism onto film. The two stories are drastically different, and their meshing is never quite successful. We never get to really care what happens to most of the characters and they remain hollow, exterior shells of themselves. This is particularly true of the character of Blaudel, who remains a cold, passionless, unattractive enigma of a man throughout the film. One wonders why Antoine would feel any affection for this person at all, other than his being his biological father.

François Méthé is surprisingly good as Antoine, as is Monique Spaziani as Céleste, Miou-Miou as Lauda and Rémy Girard as the delicious racial Litwin. Faring less well are veteran actors Françoise Faucher and Jean-Louis Roux, who are saddled with characters that seem like mere caricatures of 'bad, bad person'. Gabriel Arcand's Blaudel never evolves but simply remains a dark, brooding shadow-face.

The subtle complexities and brilliance of style of the novel simply do not play as well on the screen, which is more the pity because this film (so refreshingly un-commercial, so touchingly honest) in the end leaves you with images of gentle, melancholy happiness: like little girls in white dresses, or thin petals on a cool, clear pond.

André Guy Arseneault •

LES PORTES TOURNANTES p. René Malo, Francine Morin d. lsc. coll. Francis Mankiewicz app. d. Jeanne Crepeau sc. Jacques Savoie assoc. p. Lyse Lafontaine p. dir. Bernard Lamy cast. / dialogue coach Lise Abastado 1st. a. d. Jacques Wilbrod Benoit 2nd a. d. Bruno Bazin unit man. Mario Nadeau loc. man. Marie Potvin acc. Elisabeth Lamy asst. acc. Noella Giroux p. coord. Françoise McNeil art d. Ann Pritchard asst. art d. Lynn Trout set des. Lucinda Zak set dec. Abe Lee, Gaudeline Sauriol head props Charles Bernier asst. props Mary Lynn Deachman, Diane Gauthier head carpenter Don Mahon cost. François Barbeau asst. cost. Denise Lemieux, André Henault dresser John Stowe makeup Eric Muller hair Michel Trigon asst. hair Réjean Goderre d. o. p. Thomas Vamos cam. Patrick Weirs 1st. asst. cam. Daniel Vincelet 2nd asst. cam. Sylvaine DuFaux cont. Brigitte Germain stills photo Takashe Seida chief elect. Daniel Chrétien 1st elec. Marc Charlebois key grip Michel Périard 1st. grip Jean Maurice De Ernst 2nd. grip Alain Desmarchais sd. Bernard Aubouy boom op. Thierry Hoffman ed. André Corriveau p. asst. Sylvain Arseneault, Carole Demers, Bernard Rodrigue messengers Monique Desnoyers, Yvan Labranche publ. Caroline Grise/Publicifilms. 1. p. Monique Spaziani, Gabriel Arcand, Miou-Miou, François Méthé, Rémy Girard, Jacques Penot, Françoise Faucher, Jean-Louis Roux, Rita Lafontaine, Hubert Loiseau, Charles Rainer.

Peter Shatalow's Blue City Slammers

Well, what can a guy do these days? All this pressure to include Others - not just to repeat ourselves endlessly. Those damned funding bodies are hot on girl stories. Now we have to come up with stories about girls, regionalism and sometimes even marginals to boot. A comedy. A girls' baseball team, that'll do it, we'll call it *Blue City Slammers*.

Such scenarios aside, *Blue City Slammers'* central conceit (the obtrusive voice-over of a pregnant teenager) remains - a boy's film. You can name a film anything you like, but this film's scatology hangs - unchallenged. The voices (despite the clumsy narration of the "central consciousness") and images (the girls get less screen time than the boys) of the women are constantly eclipsed by the preeminence of the wienie, as recurring motif and in the flesh.

The girls huddle under the umbrella of ensemble acting, whereas the boys, mainly Butter, his side-kick Dougie, and Gary, a Springsteen act-alike, come replete with close-ups, mystique (in Gary's case) and intimacy among themselves. You can make the girls talk, put words in their mouths, even make the central consciousness a pregnant woman/child, but *Blue City's* real consciousness blurts from the mouth of Butter - a familiar Porky's character. Mistitling a work is forgivable. And offering a women's softball team as promotional lure (witness the misleading ad campaign) could be excused if *Blue City Slammers* transcended its limitations and hit a home run. Unfortunately lack of perspicuity is its worst offence. There are lots of cows in this pasture and none of them get milked. In other words, the film attempts to cover too much pasture - its range hampers its realization as a film.

Canadian blue-collar masculinity, the real subject, gets drowned out by competing subthemes. The potential complexity of that particular construction (small-town masculinity), as evinced in Butter's rallying jest "I've still got my balls," coupled with his later cries for his mother in his sleep, are not allowed the opportunity to gel into the compelling mix of macho bravura and pathos that could have sustained interest in his character. Mini narratives constantly pop up, stabs are made in certain directions, and we veer off into greener, but ultimately barren pastures.

Many lives and events are crammed into that last-ditch Labour Day weekend, the weekend before see-you-in-September's accountability. As a result potentially rich movies in themselves are lost. The American bordertown tension, for example, is pure throwaway and doesn't approach the richness of Sandy Wilson's *My*