

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, Gaétan 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.



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

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