

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*



The team spirit is willing, but the film's content is weak

American Cousin. The theme, however, does manage to produce a few choice lines such as "I know a place down by the river, there's nothing but Americans down there, we could do whatever we want." If only.

To name but a few lost opportunities/movies: the effects of limiting horizons on masculinity, how the nuke plant supplants traditional labour, such as farming; the return of the prodigal father/lover; evangelism and psychosis, a much-trampled road these days. *Blue City's* rush to cover all of the bases of small-town life strikes out subtlety. All that remains is a series of clichés.

Such eclecticism brings constant shifts in tone. We move from self-conscious parody, (in spite of sidling up and living with these small-town folks to do his "research", the film feels like writer Layne Coleman was distanced from his subject) to downright cheap sentiment. We move from gothic scenes with Mr. Walker (a fundamentalist preacher and father of the team's pitcher) that echo *Blue Velvet* to the antics of *Animal House*. Mr. Walker, however, does retain some degree of interest. In one sequence, character and *mise-en-scène* come together. Walker sits in a kitchen bathed in gold light and sinister music. As the camera tracks in on him, he reaches inside the fridge for his gun. But the rest of the film rarely rises above the hackneyed. "I've had enough of oil rigs and yellow trailers," the prodigal lover mutters upon returning to

BLUE CITY SLAMMERS p. Bruce Raymond d. /co-p. Peter Shatalow sc. Layne Coleman, Peter Shatalow ed. Leslie Borden Brown cons. ed. John Victor Smith p. man. Tony B. Armstrong 2nd a. d. Glenn Carter 3rd a. d. Dean Emerick filmSTAR op. Nancy Borsa p. asst. Cyndie Clayton set/props mest. Kim Stitt 1st asst. pops. Michael Meade 2nd asst. props Reid Barnett art dep. /p. a. Ken Winter hd. ward. Vickey Vandepoel asst. ward. Stacey Pegg makeup/hair Adriane Sicova, Andrea Sicova d. o. p. Robert New 1st asst. cam. James Crowe 2nd asst. cam. Trevor Haws, Gerald Van Deelen key grip Mark Mavrinac 2nd grip Tracy Shaw 2nd unit cam. Michael Savoie gaffer Adam Swica drivers Kim Smith, John Copping pub. Sharon Singer loc. sd. mix Marc S. Green boom op. Craig Baker l. p. Eric Keerleyside, Tracy Cunningham, Mary Ellen Mahoney, Gary Farmer, Fran Gebhard, Paula Barrett, Barry Greene, James O'Regan, Murray Westgate, Michael Copeman, Samantha Langevin, Stuart Clow, Gabe Hogan, Lynda Russelo. Distributed by Cineplex-Odeon Films.

Blue City.

Blue City might have looked appropriate for funding bodies or City TV. It might have looked promising as a theatre workshop. But it hasn't made the transition to film.

Kass Banning •

Jean-Claude Lord's Tadpole And The Whale

Tadpole And The Whale is the sixth film in producer Rock Demers' *Tales For All* collection of "family films." The story is stock: a young, idealistic girl named Daphne (Fanny Lauzier), who can communicate with whales and dolphins, saves a humpback whale. Her heroism brings together two stubborn brothers, "Grandpa" Hector and "Grandpa" Thomas, who haven't spoken to one another in years. Dubbed "Tadpole" for her amphibian pursuits, Daphne befriends a young couple who have come to holiday at the coastal inn where her parents work and where she has spent most of her life. The universe unfolds as it should until Daphne discovers that "Grandpa" Hector, the man who owns the inn, is planning to sell and that she will lose her dolphin friend, Elvar.

Replete with freckles and irresistible curly red hair, Fanny Lauzier is Quebec's answer to Megan Follows. Although her giggle is sometimes forced, Lauzier manages to charm, and was certainly made for this role of a 12-year-old who communes with nature in general and cetaceans in particular, has hypersensitive audio perception, and knows how to navigate motorboats on the high seas.

Shot in Quebec, Florida, and the Virgin Islands, the scenery is wild and lush but gives Québécois children a rather muddled idea of a landscape which they assume to be local. As far as I know, dolphins do not summer in the mouth of the St. Lawrence. The pacing is fast, thanks to the direction of Jean-Claude Lord, whose

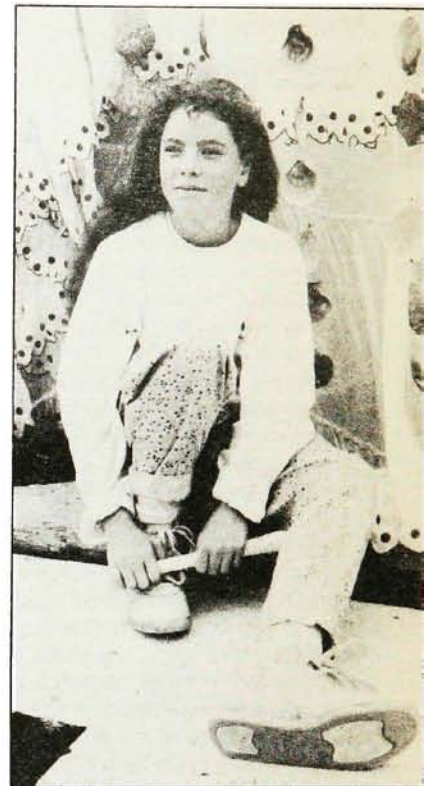
success with the television series *He Shoots, He Scores*, was due in part to the American formula of short, action-packed scenes.

If Lord set out to make an audience-pleaser, he has succeeded: for though adults may find that *Tadpole And The Whale* is predictable to a plot complication and often borders on the saccharine World of Disney films of their youth, children will be entertained. This is not to condescend to children, but judging from their response on the day I saw the movie, children love a ham and find slapstick, even the most obvious kind, funny. What saves the film, what preserves its spontaneity (for adults) and dignity (for children) is the documentary footage of the humpback whales and the graceful, awe-inspiring antics of Elvar the dolphin.

We are introduced to Daphne through the eyes of Marcel and Julie, (Denis Forest and Marina Orsini) who have come to stay at the coastal resort where Daphne's parents work. In the opening scene, the couple is speeding down a highway in their open jeep when they spot a child lying face down in the water, apparently drowned. The audience shares Marcel's relief when, soaking wet, he discovers that this child is very much alive and is only keeping her ears below the water's surface in order to hear the whales who are some 15 kilometres away.

Both Julie and Marcel are taken with Daphne, who not only introduces them to the mysterious music of the whales, but also teaches them how to play with her dolphin friend. This child-adult relationship, developed so spontaneously between a couple and a 12-year-old girl, is interesting in several respects. It feeds on children's desire to be noticed and admired by people other than their parents, though the makers of this film were careful to make sure that there is no misinterpreting Marcel's interest in Daphne. She is merely a delightful addition to his nascent family, for Julie is pregnant with their first child. The film also represents children as powerful mediators between nature and the world of adults. When "Grandpa" Thomas asks Daphne what secrets Elvar the dolphin tells her, she says she can't tell him until he's young enough to understand.

Daphne enjoys recognition as a "special child," not only by the adults who surround her, but even by her younger brother, Alex, who joins her in her good-natured battles with adults whom, as she sees it, invade nature for no good reason. For in this film there is no evil as embodied in a single individual. Evil is what humans do when they fail to notice or to listen to what is around them. When Daphne discovers Hector's plans to sell the inn, it is clear that he is not the enemy, nor are the developers who want to buy the place, nor even are the fisherman who might kill the humpback whale because he has ruined their nets. All these things are presented as human complications with human resolutions.



Quebec's answer to Megan Follows
— Fanny Lauzier

In other words, aside from Daphne's inexplicable ability to hear sounds emitted at 40 kilohertz when the rest of us mortals hear them at 16, there is wishful thinking but no magic in this film. Daphne is the agent of goodwill and good sense and her magic is that of a child who refuses to give up on the place she most loves. At a time when we are all threatened with environmental destruction and nuclear annihilation, the message that children are powerful, that they can be responsible for their habitat and teach adults something about communication, as simplistic as it is hopeful, is still a necessary one.

Naomi Guttman •

LA GRENOUILLE ET LA BALEINE p. Rock Demers d. Jean-Claude Lord. Original idea by Jacques Bobet sc. Jacques Bobet, André Melançon d. o. p. Tom Burstyn art d. Dominique Ricard ed. Helene Girard orig. mus. Guy Trepanier, Normand Dube cost. des. Huguette Gagne sd. Serge Beauchemin sd. des. Claude Langlois line p. Lorraine du Hamel p. man. Huguette Bergeron 1st. a. d. Louis-Philippe Rochon cast. Lucie Robitaille 1st asst. cam. Yves Drapeau cont. Sandrine Fayos unit man. Estelle Lemieux set dec. Diane Gauthier key props Denis Hamel 2nd a. d. Marie-Christine Lavoie asst. to p. Louise Belanger makeup Diane Simard elec. John Lewin gaffer Don Saari key grip Thorton Bayliss boom op. Pierre Blain stills photo Jean Demers dolphin trainer Mandy Rodriguez acc. Micheline Bonin p. coord. Simone Leroux publ. Kevin Tierney, Jocelyne Dorns, David Novek and Associates. l. p. Fanny Lauzier, Denis Forest, Marina Orsini, Felix-Antoine Leroux, Jean Lajeunesse, Lise Thouin, Louise Richer, Thomas Donohue, Roland Laroche, Pierre-Olivier Gagnon, Jean-Pierre Leduc, Jean Lafontaine, Jean Lemire, Andre Doyle, Claude Grise, Aline Lavoie Gray, Nat the dolphin. Produced by Les Productions La Fete. 35 mm, colour.

Dick Benner's

Too Outrageous

Outrageous was one of the few English-Canadian films to be a critical and commercial international hit in the '70s. The 1977 instant classic was full of low-budget energy and sleeper charm, and an expression of that strange Canadian identification with marginality. It also turned out to be an unconscious but acute parable of Canadian identity confusion: if this tale of a drag queen and a schizophrenic from Toronto making in it New York did not exist, we would have had to invent it. The only thing surprising about the appearance of the 1987 sequel *Too Outrageous* was that it took so long.

With *Too Outrageous*, writer-director Dick Benner and star "impressionist" Craig Russell have come up with an appealing, respectful updating of the property. In a reversal of the original story, Robin (Russell) and Liza (Hollis McLaren) return to Toronto nine years later, Robin gets a chance at the big time with an agent and a refurbished act, Liza gets published, both gamble and lose at love at the hands of a hunky brunette, and both end up poor and crazy but happy with each other once again. Unfortunately, despite a barrage of a favourable advance publicity and a gala premiere at the 1987 Festival of Festivals, the *Outrageous* formula, translated to the jaded, big-budget '80s, no longer seems to click for either critics or moviegoers.

Benner was one of many promising young directors of first films to emerge in Canada during the '60s and '70s who never managed to pull off that important second feature. Returning home to the States, Benner got to direct *Happy Birthday Gemini* (1980), a Broadway adaptation that sank without a ripple, and then retreated home to Kentucky to lick his wounds. As for La Russell, the hot new star with a Berlin Best Actor trophy tucked into his bra soon ran into hard times, personally and professionally. It was only 10 years later that the two careers converged again and were given their ill-fated second chance. This lack of continuity in the two creative careers is symptomatic of an endemic problem in Canadian popular film, and is no doubt responsible for the rarity of successful sequels in general and for most of the visible damage in this one in particular.

Too Outrageous is so abuzz with little things that work or should have worked, that it's hard to pinpoint the disappointment. Benner's screenplay and characterizations are witty and well-structured, with sparkling, fast-talking dialogue that recalls the golden era of Hollywood writing idolized by both Robin and Benner. "Remember when lubricating cream went on your cock and not on your face," gripes the aging star before his dressing room mirror, a line that could well have been Bette Davis's in *All*



La Russell does La Streisand in *Too Outrageous*

About Eve... with a few changes. Benner has once again lovingly re-created the conventions of the backstage melodrama/musical, reversing the old priorities: this time it is life that must go on, not the show. The lead performances are also fine; Hollis McLaren's Liza again glows in Robin's shadow with subtle intensity. (What has happened to this talented actress/iron of the late '70s and when will Canadian producers start giving her the parts she deserves?) A few of the smaller roles stand out as well, with Timothy Jenkins as Robin's loyal aide-de-camp almost running off with the last half of the film.

The basics are there, to be sure, but writers, directors and actors all get rusty without a chance to practice and polish their craft. The script could have used more honing, and Benner's work with his actors and technicians, his *mise-en-scène*, and his comic timing are all uneven.

Russell's contribution shows similar strains. Mae (West), Judy (Garland) and Peggy (Lee) are still inspired staples, well worth the ticket, but some of the other ladies are weak or stale and often seem just to involve Russell impersonating Russell. This leads to a larger problem: is Russell's persona strong enough to carry the whole film? I always thought the main pull of the original was the strong, defiantly sentimental narrative of the relationship, as in Margaret Gibson's original story, with the drag performances functioning as a delicious sidebar. After all, film is not exactly the best medium for Russell's genius in what is essentially a cabaret art form. In *Too Outrageous*, this is brought jarringly home by Benner's excessively tight camera and the rapturous spectator reaction-shots of Robin's audience inserted to cue our response. Then and now, audiences respond to Robin's character as much offstage as on. Far

from "outrageous," Robin has a vulnerable, teddy-bear serenity that is set off by the torments of his haunted roommate Liza. Russell appeals to mainstream spectators who would be threatened by Divine's nihilism or by the proletarian desperation of Michel Tremblay's drag queens. Russell may be closer in spirit to his Riviera relations from *La Cage Aux Folles*, but he has much more soul. These dynamics are still at work in the sequel, but they're increasingly mechanical and creaky, and too much rides on stage performances that have lost their novelty. A final soul-baring number, that presents the performer *sans masques* on a stripped-down stage, simply doesn't get off the ground because, in contrast to Judy Garland's similar numbers, the musical momentum and vocal power evaporate without the makeup and wigs.

The failure of *Too Outrageous* needs to be explained further in terms of audience factors. Although I've stressed the mainstream reaction, the specific gay constituency may be a critical factor. A crossover audience made *Outrageous* a hit; the film was tuned into both minority and mainstream without compromising either access. While *Too Outrageous* attempts to maintain this bridge, the variables have changed. You can tell from a lively internal debate about gay identity and self-censorship that Benner and the others have been wrestling with the delicate balance of the two audiences ("There's not that big a gay audience out there," says the nasty agent who tries to suppress Robin's campier moments—an echo of what I'm sure Benner has heard a million times). Though the compromises of such earlier Canadian films as Robin Phillips' *The Wars* are avoided, things still don't work out. Take AIDS, for example: Benner is right to insist that the pain and loss within the gay community must be acknowledged

in any '80s gay film. But his almost perfunctory attempts to do so leave great gaping gashes in the film. One character even delivers a long, heavy speech on AIDS that is potentially misinformative. *Too Outrageous* was eagerly anticipated in every gay publication on the continent, but the reviews turned out to be unanimously guarded. Somehow Benner miscalculated his core constituency.

As for that other key minority audience, Canadians, *Too Outrageous*'s "return-of-the-native" theme is divertingly symmetrical without being especially right. Benner's New York-Toronto opposition is less tuned in to the mythology of "us vs. them" than it was a decade ago, perhaps because the mythology itself has mutated in these days of domed stadiums. Nevertheless I enjoyed the stream of obligatory Can-Con jokes. The digs at Ottawa alone (where Robin warns Liza "they'll sterilize your mind") should at the very least have brought an honorary Genie. Robin's wrong, however, when he rules out local material for his act: "I'm too feminine to do Anne Murray. I can do the low notes, but that walk's a killer." There are other possibilities: Flora MacDonald may be too thin, but surely Forrester and Frum would be ripe material for the next installment.

That installment, alas, probably won't happen. Liza and Robin may be back in Toronto but apparently no one cares. Sequels just don't seem to come naturally to a national cinema whose hard-won success stories, in the States or elsewhere, are so few and far between.

Thomas Waugh ●

TOO OUTRAGEOUS p. Roy Krost d. /sc. Dick Benner d. o. p. Fred Guthe art d. Andris Hausmanis cost. des. Alisa Alexander ed. George Appleby orig. mus. /arr. Russ Little p. man. Dan Nyberg 1st a. d. Tony Thatcher 2nd a. d. David Till 3rd. a. d. Reid Dunlop trainee Derek Rogers sc. sup. Pauline Harlow cam. Rick McGuire 1st. cam. asst. /focus pull. Perry Hoffman 2nd. cam. asst. Audrey Smith cam. trainee Jane Davis sd. mix. Daniel Latour boom op. Paul McGlashan 1st. asst. art d. Andrew Poulos set. dec. Liz Calderhead, Marlene Grahame set dresser/buyer Thomas Rosborough prop master Paul Sweeney prop asst. Adrian Hardy ward. Maureen Gurney, Linda Leduc, Beth Pasternak, Lorraine Carson, Bruce Mellott makeup Inge Klaudi hair Madeleine Russell loc. man. Marc Dassas loc. asst. Greg Van Riel gaffer Richard Allen best boy Bryan Forde 2nd elec. Mark Woodley 3rd elec. Gabriel Chiara gen. op. Dick Wollcott key grip Dave Zimmerman dolly grip Brian Potts 2nd grip Ron Bailey 3rd grip John Hazel stunt coord. Shane Cardwell casting John Drury, Risa Gertner extras casting First Cast Extras still photo Walter Melrose asst. ed. Jay Houpt 2nd asst. ed. Kelly Makin p. coord. Justine Estee p. sec. Cathie Denison asst. to p. Lee Gordon office p. a. Chris Byford acc. sup. Doreen Davis p. acc. James Crammond asst. acc. Elaine McFeat trans. coord. Michael Davies driver captain Frank O'Neil drivers Peter Wilde, Glen Avigdor, Paul Pawluk, Mark Van Alstyne, Andres Vosu caterer Galley Kitchen Services craft service Bruce Long l. p. Craig Russell, Hollis McLaren, David McIlwraith, Ron White, Lynne Cormack, Michael J. Reynolds, Timothy Jenkins, Paul Eves, Frank Pellegrino, Norma Dell'Agnes, Norman Duttweiler, Kent Staynes, Rusty Ryan, Doug Millar, Kate Davis, Doug Paulson, George Hevenor, Jimmy James, Barry Flatman, Ray Paisley, Raymond Accolas, François Klanfer, Linda Goranson, Doug Inear. running time 105 minutes, colour. Distributed by Spectrafilm. Financial participation by Telefilm Canada, the OFDC and Dean Witter Reynolds (Canada) Inc.

Jean-Guy Noël's
Tinamer

Jean-Guy Noël uses film to play with the dimensions of time and space in *Tinamer*, a feature fiction film inspired by the novel *L'Amelanchier* by Jacques Ferron. The adult Tinamer is given the chance, on the day of her mother's burial, to console the child Tinamer (Sarah-Jeanne Salvy) by visiting her at her father's burial years before. Dipping into the past, the film becomes flashback.

This structure, which gives memory an active present, seems fitting for a film which is mostly concerned with the workings of the unconscious and conscious. In fact, the film could almost be used as a beginner's guide to Freud. The characters seem at times carton-like, embodiments of psychoanalytic thought; the film addressing or undressing, as the case may be, major Freudian tenets. Within the first five minutes of the film the spectator sees Tinamer undress as a woman and as a child. These two classic voyeur shots introduce the character to us; as a woman Tinamer stands in front of a mirror, the camera keeps a respectable or safe distance from her naked body. With a medium long shot the gaze is fixed on the double image of Tinamer at the looking glass. Satisfying further what Freud called scopophilia, the desire for pleasure through looking, we are shown the child through her bedroom window. The screen is completely dark except for a rectangle of light in which Tinamer changes clothes. Tinamer's status as object of the gaze seems well in place; the soundtrack, too, creates her subordinate position. As the child dresses, a voice is heard off-screen calling, "Tinamer, Tinamer, what are you doing? Hurry up."

Tinamer scurries toward the voice of the Father, Leon di Portanquo (Gilles Vigneault), she is off to watch the moon's eclipse with him. Running through the house the child is intercepted by Mother (Louise Portal) who makes sure Tinamer puts on a sweater so as not to catch cold. Mother's role as Guardian of the Mundane begins here, taking on larger proportions throughout the narrative until finally it comes into direct opposition with the role of the Father. Etna's (Mother) character is pretty one-dimensional and doesn't allow for interesting acting to develop or be exposed.

Leon holds the telescope and from behind it explains to Tinamer about the dark side of the moon, that area beyond their home and garden, from which he saved her mother, the city. He points the viewing device and lets Tinamer look, but it is his sights which she must see, his imagination she must embrace, for as he tells her it is not only his name that a father passes on to his child or the color of his eyes, but his dreams. Leon is an eccentric and passionate person whose egocentricities create havoc for his



Pre-school anxiety hits new heights for Sarah Jeanne Salvy

family. When Tinamer discovers through spying that her father is not the bank robber he has always proclaimed to her to be, she is devastated. Vigneault brings a charm to this character who could very easily have been bothersome at the least.

Dreaming is given a major place within the film; it is the child's dreams we see. They fill the screen with color and light; the animation and special effects were done by Michel Murray. The dream is central to the film as it is Leon's will that Tinamer successfully tame her childhood dreams and use them to create a strong sense of herself before venturing out to that dark side of the moon, represented for the child by school. The film's story focuses on Tinamer's desire, despite her father's continuous disapproval, to go to school. She begs her father to let her go. He responds with one condition; she must swear to bring him a branch from a special tree which grows in the depths of their woods. Only then will she have made the necessary passage and be allowed to go to school. Tinamer resists at first, calling her father mean for making her go into the scary woods all alone, but finally she agrees, raises her right hand and swears.

Despite the dream's centrality to the film (Tinamer's search for the branch is a dream odyssey), the actual integration of these animated sequences is awkward. What might have been part of a whole texture feels like a separate and secondary adjunct. The content of the dreams pushes for Freudian interpretation;

this reduces the potential for richness through the very obvious. Tinamer gallops through the woods in her search for the tree. This scene uses particularly beautiful filter work in day for night shooting, creating a haunting oneiric effect. The soundtrack is filled with panting and moaning, finally she comes upon the primal scene, her parents copulating, reproducing their little "becassine", as her mother explains to the shocked child.

Other special effects have difficulty in becoming smoothly integrated into the film. An interesting choreographed crowd scene is used to emphasize social pressure on the individual to conform to society's laws. As Tinamer's mother marches her to school, in her father's absence, a host of people follow her, ensuring Tinamer's delivery. They enter, the film is specially color treated to produce a monotone effect, but these citizens are gone before we really sense their presence. Somehow we realize their symbolic importance in the scene but their hurried disappearance diminishes their part in this crucial point of the film.

It is here where Mother decides to act. Fed up with her husband's refusal to send Tinamer to school, she takes matters into hand and tells her daughter that school is a moral and social obligation to which each individual must submit. Tinamer's response is full of more clues to the Freudian life puzzle. Turning away from her mother and hoping for her father to rescue her, Tinamer is taking the supposed healthy and

right course of action for a young girl. The film follows this through to the end of the story where Tinamer resolves her childhood pain and anger; the camera pans up from the family house of memory to the endless sky of possibilities.

Patricia Kearns ●

TINAMER p. René Gueissaz d./sc. Jean-Guy Noël. Based on the novel *The Juneberry Tree* by Jacques Ferron. d.o.p. François Beauchemin art d. François Lamontagne, Claire Alary anim./sp. fx. Michel Murray, NFB French animation studio ed. Jean-Guy Montpetit mus. Galt MacDermot p. dir. Danny Chalifour assoc. p. Louise Gendron, Francine Morin, Pierre Latour exec. p. Marc Daigle, René Malo 1st a.d. Carle Delaroché-Vernet 2nd. n.d. Michèle Houle cont. Marie Beaulieu 1st asst. cam. Seraphin Bouchard 2nd asst. cam. Claude Brasseur wescam op. Hans Bjerno stills photo. Pierre Dury set coord. Carole Dubuc, Louise Pilon prop master Bruno Lahaye ext. props Gilles Ducas set asst. Claude Dumas, Marie Dumas makeup Mikie Hamilton makeup asst. Suzanne Poisson hair Sylvain Doyon hair asst. André Bouchard, Rosalind Lavemen cost. des. Brigitte Lair cost. des. asst. Lucie Giasson dresser Marianne Carter sd. eng. Marcel Fraser boom op. Marcel Chouinard chief elec. Pierre Provost, Gilles Mayer elec. Jacques Gauthier, Bill Melouin, Robert Matziget, Guy Remillard key grip Johnny Daoust grip Robert Auclair asst. ed. Anne-Marie Leduc set unit man. Alain Labrosse, Robert Giroux loc. unit man. Michel Boyer, Carole Legault, Paul Bujold p. asst. Réjean Tendland, Catherine Thabourin, André Dupuis line p. (NFB) Monique Letourneau adm. (NFB) Nicole Charlebois NFB French animation studio prod. team: opt. fx. coord. Georges Mauro anim. Elaine Despains, Michèle Pauzé exec. p. Robert Forget p. Yves Leduc. l.p. Gilles Vigneault, Louise Portal, Sarah Jeanne Salvy. Produced by ACPAV and the Malofilm Group in association with the NFB. Colour, 35 mm, running time 85 min.

Claude Chabrol's
The Blood of Others

Ingredients: a Simone de Beauvoir novel, *The Blood of Others*, adapted into a mini-series by Brian Moore; director Claude Chabrol of the French cinema's New Wave; producers John Kemeny and Denis Héroux; Jodie Foster and Michael Ontkean in the romantic leads, driven by love and war respectively; Sam Neill, John Vernon, Kate Reid, Stéphane Audran, Jean-Paul Aumont, among others, in supporting roles; Paris locations; Spanish Republican supporters; World War II; Nazi-occupied France; the Resistance movement; the sweep of history... Does all of this whet your appetite but make you feel a little nervous about what you might ingest?

The Blood of Others amounts to comic book history and five-and-dime romance. As such, it makes for fascinating television. Its components are so oddly mismatched that the result is actually entertaining. Put it this way: if mini-series were graded like movies, this one would garner a big capital B.

Imagine, if you will, Barbara Stanwyck in the role of Madame Butterfly... O.K., that's enough. Now, watch Jodie Foster playing a starry-eyed Parisian *haute couture* shop girl. The casting of Jodie Foster in the role of Hélène, a young French woman who philosophically holds love above all other ideals, mars any potential *The Blood of Others* might have had in rising above the grade. It is not that Foster is a bad actress; certainly, she is not. It is that she is completely ill-suited to her role. Foster is one of the most intrinsically 'American' actresses on the screen today and as an actress she seems unable to break out of the parameters of that description. Her demeanor is broad, brash, edged, cocky and not even a French *coiffe* can soften the effect. Unfortunately, there is not a moment in the seven-and-one-half hours of screen time in which Foster is believable as Hélène; the leap of faith is simply impossible to make.

Some respite can be found in Michael Ontkean's performance as Jean, a French Resistance fighter who places political activism above all else, including his love for Hélène, a woman who has placed her love for him above all else. Ontkean's performance is soft and inoffensive. It contrasts the essence of the scripted character's moral fortitude and thereby plays well. It is not an exciting performance but it is certainly interesting enough to hold our attention and afford us some indication of what Hélène sees in Jean.

What emerges as the highlight of the series is the performance by Sam Neill in the role of Bergman, a perverse, opportunistic German



The midwest meets the Left Bank; Jodie Foster is hilariously miscast in *The Blood of Others*

businessman who is obsessed with Hélène. Here is a consummate actor who knows how to tune his performance to the needs of the medium. Neill revels in the lasciviousness of his character, bringing to the role an undertone of smooth, diseased menace.

Supporting performances are uneven. For example, Jean-Pierre Aumont, as Jean's wealthy publisher father, plays it straight and respectfully; John Vernon, as a Nazi general, camps it up (rather successfully) whereas Stéphane Audran, as a *haute couture* designer who has an affair with the Nazi general, tries the same and only succeeds at being annoying.

Aside from the variances in the performances, Chabrol manages to shape a few good dramatic moments; far too few and far between, however, to bring real life to this lumbering mini-series.

Richard Ciupka, as director of photography, has shot *The Blood of Others* beautifully, but the cold look chosen does not help bring needed energy to the series.

A lushly romantic musical score by François

Dompierre much enhances the often sparse scenes. Although sometimes overused, its themes are quite beautiful.

Good use is made of archival footage at the beginning of each installment of the *The Blood of Others*. Of good quality and superbly edited, this material provides us with just enough of the sense of time and place to create a sufficient historical backdrop to allow the romance to unfold.

Brian Moore's screenplay is overburdened by screen time. What is presented to us in *The Blood of Others* could have been condensed quite nicely into a feature-length film. It is interesting to note that the mini-series was shot with just such an intention although four years after the project was produced we are only now seeing the mini-series and there have been no signs of a feature-length film having been distributed. The screenplay contains a lot of action scenes but very little suspense and few situations clever enough dramatically to really grab the imagination. Moments which should add needed excitement to the mini-series only

succeed in dragging it down.

The philosophical underpinning for the screenplay, taken from de Beauvoir's novel, is evident but only sparsely drawn and, as a result of the leads' performances, takes on little more meaning than the stuff of soaps. Hélène becomes merely irritating as she voices her love for Jean over and over again. As a woman with talent and fortitude, she seems the fool to cast all her energies towards a man who is more in love with political action and continually regards her with a kind of loving bewilderment. What is in essence an analysis of the love of the individual versus the love of humanity in general in the novel, becomes, in the mini-series, simply the story of an incompatible couple in troubled times.

Toby Zeldin •

THE BLOOD OF OTHERS p. Denis Héroux, John Kemeny d. Claude Chabrol sc. Brian Moore. Based on the novel by Simone de Beauvoir. A Cine-Simone-Filmmax-Antenne 2/Films A2 co-production.

Sylvie Groulx's

Chronique d'Un Temps Flou

Whereas once the agents of higher learning stretched the perceived philosophic limitations of the minds of their students by recounting the parable of the monkey-astronaut, the typewriter and the duplicated Shakespeare text, nowadays, the argument for the objective work of art – separate as to artist, property owner, owner of the means of production and reproduction – faces strong resistance.

Feminists are but one group of political thinkers who collide with the issue of objectivity, because objectivity intrinsically denies process; where the product has come from, who has carried, nurtured and, in labour, has given birth to the supposedly objective work.

From the very outset, Sylvie Groulx's *Chronique d'un temps flou* states itself to be a woman's documentary – not necessarily a film which would earn the High Academic Feminism seal of approval – but a film spoken through a woman's language, through Groulx's perspective.

In the most literal sense, Sylvie Groulx is present in her film, not simply through her voice but in her visual presence on screen. Through this presence and the on-screen explanation of Groulx's focus – today's generation of Québécois/e youth – the masquerade of objectivity is negated. We see who is making this film and why.

Groulx claims that she is searching for the missing link between parent and child. In order to better understand the generation in between herself and that of her young son, this very particular quest is 'balanced' with a loosely sociological study of five main characters: Maryse and Jean, students at the Université de Montréal, Danièle and Robert, photographer and collage artist living in Montreal's bohemian ghetto, and Mario and the members of his heavy metal band.

As Groulx questions her interviewees, her specific choices of verbal and visual content in *Chronique d'un temps flou* become increasingly clear. Mario is interviewed at home with his parents who express reserved concern for their son and his future, as well as commenting on their own adolescent years. Maryse is filmed discussing her family's history, over photo album snapshots. Danièle and Robert discuss their relationship as romantic partners and as partners in the art trade.

Children as products of their parents, parents themselves being a product of a particular time, is as much of a concern for Groulx if not more so



PHOTO: ALAIN CHAGNON

The missing links? Robert and Danièle, residents of Montreal's bohemian ghetto

than a specific examination of Groulx's subjects' and the social context of Quebec in the '80s. Her inclusion of footage from the late '60s movement of social/youth rebellion (in Montreal and Paris) appears to be personal nostalgia extraneous to the film's focus. Simultaneously, it presents itself as another clue to Sylvie Groulx and her concerns as a young woman living in Quebec in the '60s.

Unfortunately, it is the more traditional, controlled, survey style sequences wherein the film is weakest; where Groulx and/or the traditional use of documentary form fail to bring out the personal, the self or the filmmaker behind the film. For either traditional documentary style confines by its need to find the objective answer or statistic e.g. this is what Québécois/e youth are like today, or Groulx, mistakenly, veers away from her confessed intention in making this film; attempting to cover too wide a base with too small a representation of subjects in too short a period of time.

This where Groulx's voice is most muffled. She allows herself to be cloaked in this guise of objectivity through a hesitancy in embarking on a documentary path which exposes herself as much as her interviewees – the understandable timidity of speaking a film language which, in making the filmmaker visible, also makes the filmmaker a more visible target.

But even allowing for a traditional approach, how could one possibly capture what is

distinctive about, in this case, Québécois/e youth, when youth culture is intrinsically a culture that has yet to define for itself a unique identity, still sampling and testing what has been handed down to it?

The clearest and most insightful segments of Groulx's film, on the other hand, are when Groulx stands closest to her own territory, to the answers she is most interested in exploring or evoking in *Chronique d'un temps flou*; the nature of parent/child relationships and the search for what separates Groulx's experiences as a young adult with what will be experienced by her son growing up in Quebec in the '90s.

Hence *Chronique d'un temps flou*, in its most honest moments, is not a documentary about Maryse, Jean, Daniele, Robert or Mario, but about Sylvie Groulx. In a frequently obvious comparative analysis, Groulx looks at the youth of Quebec in the 1980s vis-à-vis herself, her development from teenager and student to mature woman and mother.

Groulx's status as parent and/or mother, both biologically and symbolically, in *Chronique d'un temps flou* neatly closes the cycle of the film as the camera and film time reveal the favoritism, or more correctly, the adoption, by Groulx, of Maryse, the articulate Université de Montréal student, interested in feminist politics, social issues and the politics of family.

This 'maternal instinct' is not the sole indicator that Groulx's film is a woman's documentary – even allowing for the possibility

that women seem to be more comfortable expressing their emotions vis-à-vis parenting than men – but can be seen as an example of women's readiness to expose themselves in their work; to make themselves visible.

Where Groulx resorts to a more objective approach, either with fly-on-the-wall documentary camera work, or in talking head interview shots, we feel least connected to her film. And this problem of reverting to a 'male' documentary language, one that masks the gender and the intent of the filmmaker, if not the existence of human being as filmmaker, is not merely a task for women to overcome but something which contemporary male documentary filmmakers must deal with as well.

In an age where individuals know too well how the media operate and to whose advantage or disadvantage media function a filmmaker can no longer hope to fool with the use of the objective posture. Whether intentionally or not, this is one point that emerges from Groulx's film – one point of knowledge inherent to the culture of those brought up in the Western media-saturated milieu of the '60s, '70s and '80s.

Clea Notar •

CHRONIQUE D'UN TEMPS FLOU d. Sylvie Groulx. p. Lucille Veilleux, Yvon Provost cam. Michel LaVeaux sd. Claude Beaugrand, Diane Carrière, Esther Auger ed. Jean Saulnier. Produced by Vent d'Est Inc with the financial participation of SOGIC, Telefilm Canada, Radio-Quebec, the NFB and the Groupe d'interventions, de recherches et d'information jeunesse dist. Les Films du Cepuscul. 16 mm, colour running time 87 min.