

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. ip. 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. Marie-Christine Lavoie asst. to p. Louise Belanger 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 Dornis, 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.