

well-defined boundaries. It's a question of style, a question of how you're going to allow yourself to be seen." Yet this is not consistent with his subsequent comments in connection with the film: "To celebrate your own life is important... It's as important as presuming to know the rest of the world." To "celebrate" one's life on film, one must first acknowledge just what sort of life is involved, then commit oneself to getting the dynamics of that life onto the screen, "emotional goods" and all. Many filmmakers make no claims to anything other than entertaining their audience; attempting nothing but fantasy. May, however, is raising up audience expectation, then selling us short in **Mother Tongue**.

**Mother Tongue**, called "an honest portrait," is a film in the category of offshoots from, and reactions to *The Documentary Tradition*, which might be termed the genre of 'realism reconsidered.' Through a juxtaposition of events, May forces narrative elements in the editing to impose the idea of 'theme' and 'continuity.' He inserts material, foreign to the time and place of the situation portrayed — for example, the stock studio footage used, which May's voiceover leads us to believe is of his father, is simply an actor performing a stunt. He uses voiceover for informative expediency, but also to ensure a dimension of subjectivity, a dream sense, that kind of poetic condensation of experience portrayed by Duras in her films. May uses these manipulations of reality to create a representative, rather than a formally 'realistic,' whole. When properly used, this sort of film style can often impart more of the feeling and substance of a situation, than a style which is rigidly bound to the stylistic conventions of the documentary genre — as Duras and others have shown. However, in **Mother Tongue**, the technique merely sloughs over the reality. Pretty images and poetics can obscure, instead of enhance reality if the filmmaker is not determined, above all else, to inform.

Patricia Nolin is May's main subject. According to him, it was extremely difficult to film her "naturally," so aware is she of the camera, due to her experience as an actress. This problem is not apparent in the film, since her manner is consistent with the stylized film technique. It is not that Nolin is difficult to film, but that May has difficulty seeing and listening to her — he can't film her as she *really* is for this reason. There is much evidence of this in **Mother Tongue**, in their daily activities, where Nolin is shown in a multitude of

settings; in the studio, in the home, in the makeup chair in the morning, on the kitchen floor scrubbing at night. May waits with wine. There is an argument between them, where we see how she keeps her thoughts inside: in this case concerning the use of language in their home. She says to herself, "My tongue is tired of speaking English." This is heard in voiceover, an indication that May does in fact understand the nature of their relationship and its weak areas. Yet, in spite of any understanding we might have, we see in the next sequence that his actions are unaffected. May and Nolin have picked up the argument again. She asks him why he is not able to speak French yet, so that she may sometimes use the language with which she feels most comfortable. He says he is putting it off until the referendum. As though sensing the selfish implications of this answer, Nolin asks him what he will do if the referendum is won: will he leave her? May says he will

go where there is work for him. Characterizing this scene, and their relationship as shown throughout the film, is his self-absorption, and her passivity. The passivity appears at times as a kind of sacrificing fortitude, but is, in almost every case, a concession made to her husband's unfair emotional terms and her own emotional insecurity.

The most glaring point to be made in **Mother Tongue** is that there is a politic in the state, the home, and the person: what is imposed upon the individual, and what is chosen by that individual, for the good of each, or for all, is the omnipotence of politics — there is no avoiding it; there is only an avoidance of pointing it up for what it is. May has shirked the tradition of 'documentary' and the 'realism reconsidered' genres in **Mother Tongue**. Both genres aim to tell the truth; May seems to be avoiding it.

Katherine Dolgy

## Destiny's Angel

p.c. Destiny Films (1980) exec.p. J. Francis Brinckman p./d. Craig Cottle sc. Richard Zelniker, Craig Cottle d.o.p. Bill Casey asst.cam. Dave Kerr ed. Patrick Vallyly asst.ed. Danielle A. Malka sd.ed. Roger Lemoyne art d. Pierre Gregoire mus. from the Nutcracker Suite by P. Tchaikovsky mus.arrange./perf./rec. André Vincelli choreog. Gabriel Orbach pre.p.coord. Bruce Paulauskis key grip Walter Klymkiw p.asst. Tiggie Black p.sec. Madge Owens l.p. Saba Sluyter, Roy Witham, Oxanna Zanft, Rosa Squicciarini, Sascha Patera, Penelope Maki col. 16 mm running time 25 min.

**Destiny's Angel** is an independently-produced, Canadian film for juveniles, whose exuberant music and magnificent colour almost counterbalance the film's deadly seriousness. The story revolves around nine-year-old Melissa whose entire world has been shattered by her parents' recent divorce; school and ballet lessons become dreary chores to be avoided.

Shortly before the Christmas ballet recital, precisely when Melissa is supposed to be rehearsing for the holiday performance, she is seen wandering about a neighbourhood park. There she meets Capp, the park's elderly custodian, who not only befriends her but becomes her "angel," i.e. her source of encouragement to confront life's difficulties and conquer them. (The friendship between the child and the grandfather type is reminiscent of **Lies My Father Told Me**, but is unfortunately marred by the very sentimentalism

which **Lies** avoided.) Capp dies before the film's end, but not before he succeeds in raising Melissa's spirits. Her "angel" has shown her her destiny, and his friendship has allowed her to embrace it.

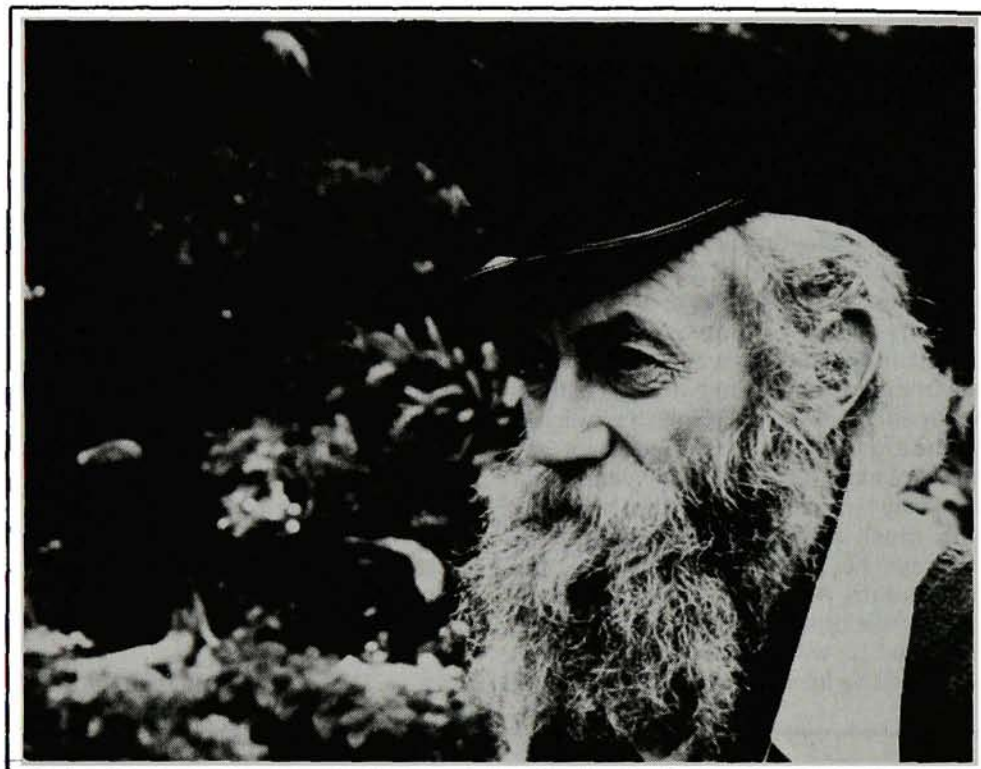
Montrealers will find an added attraction in **Destiny's Angel** because its setting is Westmount's botanical garden and the adjoining grounds — a cinematographer's delight. The contrast of the snow-covered grounds to the multicoloured floral interior of the greenhouse lends a jungle-like fertility to the latter, one which is capable of nourishing the story's depressed heroine.

**Destiny's Angel** is already in distribution in Toronto, New York, and London, England. It has been bought by the CBC, and the French version — which is being produced by Les Productions de la Chouette — has been sold to Radio-Canada. Despite this apparently fine reception of the film, there is one major reservation about it, concerning the producer's judgment of what constitutes "juvenile" cinematic fare.

In the good old days, right and wrong were so clearly perceived that the agonizing dilemmas of life, the inevitable paradoxes of human existence, the issues that were neither black nor white, were all decidedly absent from children's films. Instead, a God-like narrator or a saintly child 'preached' to the captive audience.

But in a year when eleven-year-olds are queued up to see **Kramer vs. Kramer**, **Destiny's Angel** is anachronistic.

## SHORT FILM REVIEWS



Following her parent's divorce, Capp (Roy Witham) is *Destiny's Angel* to young Melissa

ic in its sentimental morality. It delivers too many sermons.

Ethical issues, of course, belong in films for every age group, but the viewer is not comfortable with a juvenile film which

takes advantage of the viewer's youthfulness to sneak in a paid political announcement. Explicit journalism and adult fare on television, have helped raise a generation of very sophisticated, street-

wise children, who have learnt to doubt all the easy pieties that nourished the last generation.

Can children recognize moralizing? One eleven-year-old described *Destiny's Angel* as old-fashioned. Her twin brother said it was like saying "orange juice was good for you."

The film misses the mark in its perception of children in one other area, that of speech patterns. Melissa often delivers her lines with an inflection that adults *think* children use in their normal speech patterns. For example, after meeting Capp, Melissa asks him "Do you come here *all* the time?" with the "all" pronounced "aaaaall." Similarly, Melissa expresses her fear of punishment by saying "She'll be 'fuuuurious' with me." In fact, children's speech inflections are quite similar to those of adults speaking the same language; anyone with an ear for language will object to Melissa's exaggerated speech.

Craig Cottle has produced a film which is rich in colour, sound, and mood, but he needs a script writer who is more familiar with the sophistication of today's "juveniles." Otherwise, he has cause to be proud of his first professional film.

Gita Rotenberg

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