

## The Inheritance

d./sc. John Kramer nar. Donald Brittain ed. John Kramer, Richard Todd d.o.p. Pierre Letarte p.a./asst.ed. Rita Roy sd.rec. Richard Besse sd.ed. André Galbrand mus.ed. Don Douglas sd.re-rec. Hans Peter Strobl as- soc.p. Mark Zannis p. Adam Symansky exec.p. Adam Symansky exec.p. Peter Katadotis stills Courtesy of the Centre de documentation, La Presse Ltée col. 16 mm running time 58 min. 18 sec. dist. National Film Board of Canada

With all the hoopla about a new constitution, federal-provincial relations, and national heroes and villains, **The Inheritance** makes a timely appearance to offer English Canada a retrospective focus on the Quebec question.

The National Film Board's John Kramer wrote and directed this one-hour documentary about the late Quebec Premier, Daniel Johnson, and the political legacy he left to his two sons. They are members of politically opposite parties. Was it a patrimonial bequest of ambivalence? Or do they personify the essence of Quebec politics? Theirs is an inheritance which may not be spent.

This ambivalence is what Kramer tries to underscore in his depiction of Johnson — a benevolent, Union Nationale, traditionalist conservative, who embraced both Maurice Duplessis' old guard elite and a new generation of Quebec nationalists. In conducting this balancing act, Johnson appears less a director of Quebec nationalism than a politician trying to swim to the crest of its wave and remain afloat.

The truism running through the film is that, in politics, the name of the game is power first, ideology second. In the early '60s Johnson tried and failed to become premier by promising to bring back the good old days and by Red-baiting Liberal opponents like René Lévesque. Trying another tack, he jumped on the nationalist bandwagon and attempted to win over the young nationalists who were abandoning Liberal Premier Lesage. Johnson found the slogan "Equality or Independence" covered all his bases. Quebec was already *une nation*, a word that has never translated well in English Canada.

Footage of the first constitutional conference in 1968 makes the most recent exercise seem like a pastiche. Then, Prime Minister Pearson, with Justice Minister Trudeau at his elbow, warned darkly that failure would mean the failure of Confederation. A confident

Trudeau, anxious to enshrine language rights, remarked prophetically that if Johnson believed the door had been closed on Quebec, it would be opened and closed in the future, depending on the mood of the day. He closed it on special status and Johnson was left with the ominous half of his slogan. An owlish Claude Ryan (whose own newspaper was then arguing for special status) denounced Trudeau's simplistic advice about linguistic equality. In 1980, Ryan sounds like Johnson did then, Levesque, like Ryan then, and Trudeau is still fiddling the same federalist tune.

But politics is not known for consistency. Rather like Plato's shadows on the cave walls, there are forces which undulate, focus momentarily, then change appearance. This is what is difficult to portray, especially in a com-

pilation film where the director has little control over footage which others have shot. All the more remarkable has been Kramer's success in manipulating stock footage to encapsulate history. This film appeals to both the general and the specialist audience, and in the best of the documentary tradition should spark discussion and debate.

Intercut with the historical footage are interviews with the sons. Daniel Jr., suspicious of people's motives, admits that a politician's children learn to hide their personalities and feelings. He describes it as a self-imposed shell. The audience can only wonder why he chose the Liberal Party, and how he became vice-president of Power Corporation, symbol of order, progress and modern Quebec capitalism. A glimpse of him as father and hockey coach to his



Quebec's former Premier Daniel Johnson in a jubilant pose before a poster of Maurice Duplessis.

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## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

own son fails to reveal his emotive qualities.

Pierre-Marc is also an enigma, though his articulation of "fraternity, a human dimension to being a politician — something joyous about it," comes very close to revealing an aspect of Parti Québécois nationalism that English Canada has difficulty understanding. He, too, says nothing about his decision to enter then leave medicine, and nothing about his own family life. He confines personality and actions to political statements about Quebec. To die in politics as his father did is a noble thing. One wishes there were more probing questions about father-son and brotherly relations.

But he and Daniel Jr. are directing the camera, not Kramer, and in political documentary one must take what the subject chooses to reveal. Because a sophisticated media presence is a prerequisite for contemporary politicians, there are no surprise revelations before the camera's innocent eye. Having revealed little of themselves, the brothers are satisfied with the film.

Has Kramer made too much of the convenient dichotomy between the Johnson brothers and the peculiar nature of Quebec politics? Quebec's ambivalence and contradictory inner life do not effect the longstanding tug of war between the province and the federal power. The film's hindsight provokes at least two questions: Will not a querulous Quebec probably always need Ottawa to berate? Is not cultural sovereignty what this whole period in our history is about?

**The Inheritance** has much to offer English Canada. Word has it that the CBC brass have not yet agreed to show the film nationally. They claim there is not enough knowledge of Daniel Johnson or his sons, outside of Quebec, for the film to be of national interest. Does civil service muffledom believe that keeping Canada parochial is good? And is that standing on guard for the true national identity? Why should Canadians offer sops and soaps to maintain mythical number? Why should Canadians not be talked up to and exposed to many interpretations of their country's recent past? It was Cicero who said in effect that to remain ignorant of things past is to remain a child. Some CBC executives might contemplate Cicero before convening programming meetings.

## The Music Box Dancer

p. Peter Kiviloo d. Peter Kiviloo sc. Peter Kiviloo, Tina Soomet ed. Tina Soomet d.o.p. Alar Kiviloo sd. Ao Loo mus. Frank Mills, Michael Root grip Lembitu Ristsoo l.p. Marie Fennell, Ray Conn col. 16mm running time 20 min. p.c. Cinex Films.

**Music Box Dancer** is a short drama produced and directed by Peter Kiviloo which deals in a touching and intelligent way with the effect of divorce on the relationship between a parent and a child who have become separated from each other.

The story is about the reunion of nine-year-old Rachel, who lives in Toronto, with her father who lives in England. For most of the film we hear and see from Rachel's point of view. Rachel begins her narration, as most nine-year-olds would, with hopes and wishes about her father that are completely loving and enthusiastic, but which are also, sadly, not very realistic. As she waits for her father to arrive and watches her music box dancer turn slowly she thinks, "He's coming just to see me," and, "I want to be with him forever!" In the beginning the music box dancer symbolizes this fanciful ideal.

But dad hasn't come just to see her. He has business to do, and other people to see. And of course, he has to go away again. It's difficult for Rachel, but gradually she comes to realize that she and her father can still love each other even if they cannot always be together. As the story reaches its conclusion the music box dancer has been transformed into a reflection of her new maturity and thoughtfulness. Rachel understands that she is growing up into a less than perfect world.

The film has a little twist at the end. Suddenly the narration switches from Rachel to her father. We discover that *he* had been thinking in the same way that Rachel had: "I wish I could keep her forever..." But as they play tag in the park and Rachel constantly eludes him, his thoughts tell us that he too has come to realize that this is impossible.

The game in the park, the music box dancer, a glass gift from father to Rachel that breaks; the visual metaphors are simple and effective. Together with the narration they present an important two-way lesson that both children and parents will be able to recognize and share.

**Music Box Dancer** is a film that could shed some light on, and generate an understanding of a sad situation that involves so many people today.

Gary Evans

John Brooke