

**G**o! Before anything else can be said in review of *Lilies*, I insist that you go see it and promise you won't regret it.

A plot synopsis, aside from being a disservice to someone planning to see it, would fail to convey the film's finer aspects: the breathtaking beauty of the images laid upon the voluptuous intricacies of the script and upheld by the profound performances of the actors.

## Cinema

The only other way to convince you to see it—if my enthusiastic but humble opinion hasn't done so—is to describe who and what makes *Lilies* a cinematic masterpiece that is sure to further add to its list of awards. (And maybe you can glean a few juicy hints along the way.)

*Lilies* is directed by John Greyson, teacher, writer and homo, who also directed *Zero Patience*, a 1994 musical satire about the scapegoats of the AIDS epidemic. Greyson has published several books and normally writes what he directs.

"The most subversive thing about *Lilies*," he says, "is its refusal to be sacrilegious. It was never meant to be sacrilegious. It is romantic. It's a film for anyone who has ever been young and in love."

Screenwriter Michel Marc Bouchard has achieved star status in his native Quebec and around the world, with numerous critically acclaimed plays to his credit. Reflecting on his first experience scripting a film, he says, "A playwright is much freer than a screenwriter. Theater is poor, so the writing is rich. Everything can be described verbally, and writing relies on what is evoked. But cinema is illustration. So, as a much richer medium, the writer becomes more humble and modest."

For a U.S. audience, the most recognizable actor—but by no means the only one worth mentioning—is Brent Carver, who earned a Tony Award for his part in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. In *Lilies*, Carver plays a prisoner and the Countess de Tilly.

It can be disturbing to see female character played by men, but in this case—and in the context of the film—it is both situationally necessary and thematically relevant. All of the parts in *Lilies* are played by men, and no special care was given to hiding that fact. Makeup is at a minimum, and the costume designers made bosomless dresses for certain of the characters. The significance of such details are indicative of the production's artistic integrity and what the film successfully brings from the stage to the screen: the thoughtfulness and skillful acting that is often absent from Hollywood's titillating and superficially entertaining fare.

The film packs a lot of punch. It has an intensely literary quality and beautiful imagery,



Danny Gilmore (left) and Jason Cadieux enact the martyrdom of St. Sebastian, one of the film's many plays-within-a-play

## CECI N'EST PAS UN FILM

*Even on the big screen, the play's the thing in the tragic, romantic drama Lilies*

by Christopher D. Cuttone

combining an emotionally powerful plot with potent performances. Bouchard himself transformed his script into a screenplay and took advantage of the new medium to add to the play's evocative moments.

The action takes place in two time periods and two locations simultaneously: 1912 in the fashionable vacation village of Roberval in northern Quebec, and 1952 in a Canadian federal prison. When describing the movements between these two settings, one is tempted to use the word

"seamless," which one would have difficulty using to describe a stage production.

It is impossible not to notice the change. The prison, not surprisingly, is drab and colorless, while Roberval is all light and color and *Karma Chameleon*-esque. Still the transition is always fluid, though it may be abrupt or incomplete, with the temporal incursion of a character in one time being startled by a loud noise from the future or two old men attending a dinner party alongside their younger selves.

These moments, which could not be accomplished live on stage, are some of the most thrilling and visually compelling moments of the film. One cannot help but gasp as the ceiling is lifted off the prison chapel confessional to expose the dim, dark-wood interior to the blazing, cloudless sky of Roberval while a red-and-gold hot-air balloon floats majestically overhead.

The play's concept, however, remains central to the film: *Lilies* contains countless other plays-within-a-play, some theatrical and some delusional, that fuel the development of characters and plot. There is the fantasy world of the tragically disappointed Countess, who says to her son while lying in a self-made grave, "Don't spoil my legacy, play the part." There is the witty repartee of Lydie-Anne, who speaks lies but is brutally, beautifully perceptive—with something of modern-day drag-queen sass—who says upon losing her young lover, "Go ahead, Simon, play your part."

There is Father St. Michel's daring boys' school production of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian, which becomes conflated with the actual love affair of its two stars, and there is the play staged by the prisoners so that Simon can transform his confession into an act of revenge.

This notion of play is a large part of the film's literary quality of daring juxtapositions and potent interactions, viewed from the multiple perspectives provided by the multiple plays, and the tension that arises from these devices.

Much of what makes *Lilies* beautiful is not pleasing to everyone, though. Sure, there are some really fine-looking young actors and bit of well-placed nudity, but the depth of the film can be intimidating and—for audiences used to explosions and celebrities—a bit of a turn-off.

However, a moving plea for the more refined aspects of cinema as an art form is offered by one of the film's characters. Upon the cancellation of his radically romantic revision of the story of the death of St. Sebastian, a turning point in the lives of other characters as well, Father St. Michel mourns the lack of appreciation given his artistic endeavor: "The repudiation of the rational, the intoxication of the divine, the revolution of the sacred, release from the constraints of the scripture...they don't understand."

It is a mistake not to give *Lilies* consideration as more than entertainment.

*Lilies* plays Dec. 5-11 at Cinema 21, 616 NW 21st Ave. Shows are at 7, 8:55 and 10:35 pm nightly, with weekend matinées at 1, 3 and 5 pm. Tickets are \$5.50 general. For more information, call 223-4515.

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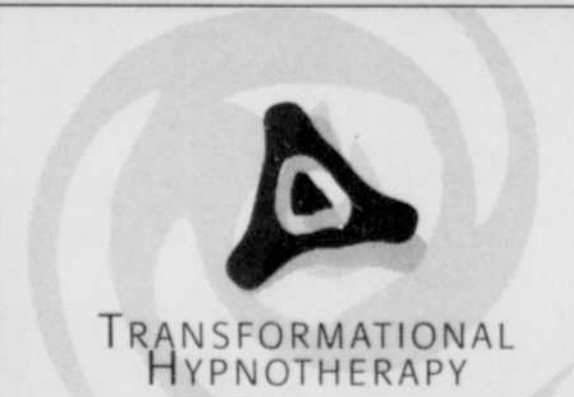
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