

stretches like a rubber band as the dialogue unfolds. The camera work and music add to the atmosphere as the man (Michael Hogan) and the girl (Valerie Buhagiar) strike sparks. Well written, with first-rate actors and good production values in a superior little piece of drama.

SHORT

Joe 90

Directed and produced by Ross Dyck, co-produced by Ernest Hallonquist. 16mm/video, 12 mins.

Reviewed by Pat Thompson

The fat man tools along the hot and dusty prairie road—his car bears the logo “Big City Crop Insurance.” It’s Joe 90, a claims adjuster. He stops at a lonely (and weird) cantina where there’s a lookout man on the roof and a lot of Spanish spoken. A jittery lad, Dick Rotundo, approaches Joe 90 and incites him to defraud his company. Daffy Dick runs into a burning field and is enveloped; Joe 90 takes off—and then finds that Dick’s alive. The pair join to form an uneasy alliance in a bleak future. Billed as a “comedy,” this skewed and

IN SEARCH OF JOY



spooky effort from the folks at the Winnipeg Film Group is worth a 12-minute watch. The muffled sound irritates—but perhaps that’s part of the effect?

BOOK

Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking

By Alan Williams, Harvard University Press, 458 pages, \$19.95

Reviewed by Paul Gottlieb

The title of this book holds a clue to its approach: **Republic of Images** develops the history of French filmmaking very much in the context of the history and politics of the times it covers, roughly from Méliès to Malle. Which is a lot of republics.

The author gives fair warning: “The reader interested in analysis and criticism of particular films or filmmakers’ *oeuvres* will have to look elsewhere for guidance.” Indeed. In the same paragraph, Mr. Williams also claims that, “The films are my ‘primary texts,’ and I have generally

sought to give my own reactions to them rather than paraphrase and dilute the insights of others.”

This claim is more difficult to accept, for if there is a keylight aimed at the subject, it is powered by strong research and reliance on contemporary sources and background information. Reactions to the “primary texts”—the films—have the low candlepower of a filler.

The result is a book that is encyclopedic in scope, informative, and often enjoyable to read. It seems to have been influenced by the “Tradition of Quality,” the school of French filmmaking dominant for the better part of three decades from the thirties onward. Mr. Williams understands this tradition and defines it with accuracy: “In this film (*Nana*) one can see the Tradition of Quality doing what it knew how to do best, unapologetically, with a knowing leer at the audience: making decorative, sexy, ironic, class-conscious, bourgeois entertainment.” His description, with the exception of “sexy,” fits his own work as well.

Cool, ironic and distant—the proper attitude for an overview—and an academic one at that—the book leaves this reader less than satisfied. One reason may be the scarcity of visuals. Considering that film is the book’s “primary text,” 33 photos on 458 pages seems less than generous. (This reader is, incidentally, a fortunate viewer who grew up with Gabin, Jovet, Gérard Philippe, Michèle Morgan and Arletty Saturday afternoons at the Hungarian equivalent of the Roxy. Having watched these works of art simply as movies, I was hoping for some memory-joggers.)

The ultimate impression left by **Republic of Images** is one of watching a well-constructed, narrated and edited documentary composed entirely of long shots. Nothing and no one emerges in **première plan**. Consequently, everything’s there but the magic. One cannot fault professor Williams for that. He aimed at comprehensiveness and comprehension, a task he has clearly achieved. **Republic of Images** is a work of substance and quality on a subject worthy of genius.

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