

# SHORT TAKES

BY TOM MCSORLEY

## *Milo 55160*

2004 18m p Matthew Cervi, d/sc David Ostry, pb Jordan Lynn, ed Robert Swartz; with Patrick McKenna, Anne Tager Page, Graham Kartna, Darren Frost, Mark Caven.

*Milo 55160* is the story of a ghost in the machine, an affirmation of human volition over closed systems of thought, and a sharp sliver of doubt in the sole of the corporate foot. Starring the ever-impressive Patrick McKenna (Harold in *The Red Green Show*) as Milo, a mild-mannered—what can we call him?—admissions officer at the gates of heaven. As Milo processes the dead who are on their way to heaven, or elsewhere, a young boy arrives with a yo-yo in his hand. Initially unaware of the significance of such a token, Milo is told that when a person possesses an object from the living world it means he/she is not dead; however, if the object is confiscated by the officer, death is assured. Milo, a quintessential company man who needs to fill his quota for promotion, is faced with a decision: to keep the yo-yo and assure the boy's death or return it and, maybe, give him another chance at life. While the film's supernatural context is foregrounded, its real relevance applies to attitudes toward life here on earth. In particular, attitudes about blind loyalty to objectives set by others. In a witty and unsettling parody of RCMP-speak as well as a transcendental version of the lexicon of the corporation, Milo's boss tells him matter-of-factly, "We always get our man, woman or child." As Milo demonstrates, and Ostry's film passionately and intelligently argues, it doesn't have to be that way.

## *White Out*

2004 16m p Larissa Groulx, d Matt Sinclair-Foreman, sc Abigail Kinch, Matt Sinclair-Foreman, pb Gregory Middleton, ed Stephen Philipson, mus Tygh Runyan; with Tyler Kyte, Ephraim Ellis, Christine MacFadyen, Allan Zarnett.

Let's face it, most films about teen angst are often of interest only to teens experiencing angst. Not so, however, with Matt Sinclair-Foreman's insightful and handsomely rendered tale of young man blues, *White Out*. Revolving around the friendship between the quiet, thoughtful Craig (Kyte) and his irrepressible best friend, Wade (Ellis), *White Out* explores themes of death, grief and guilt in subtle, surprising ways. Craig and Wade plan to go to Thailand after they finish high school, but Wade is killed in a class ski trip that the studious Craig had decided to skip at the last minute, despite his friend's entreaties. As Craig attempts to deal with his personal catastrophe, Wade turns up from the afterlife as a very animated, anything-but-frozen zombie. Through their imaginary encounters, Craig confronts not only his loss of Wade but



also the truth that he had no intention of going to Thailand, having applied to university instead. The revelation of this truth, this small betrayal, is superbly realized in the film, delivered as a posthumous apology to his fallen friend. Sinclair-Foreman's assured and sensitive direction overcomes a limited script and, within its deceptively simple storyline, *White Out* packs considerable emotional punch.

## *Defile in Veil*

2003 10m p/d/sc/ph/ed deco dawson, mus Patric Caird; with Deborah Axelrod.

Started in 1998, and shot at intervals of one day a year for five years by Winnipeg filmmaker deco dawson (*FILM (dzama)*, *The Fever of the Western Nile*) with contemporary dancer Deborah Axelrod, *Defile in Veil* is an oneiric, atmospheric portrait of one woman's search for purity and identity. Opening and closing with a double exposure of a young woman floating delicately against a backdrop of the sky, dawson's black-and-white marvel, drawing upon silent film era visual tricks and variable exposures, charts obscure processes of self-examination, dream and introspection as a woman reflects upon herself, her body and vague dangers of human existence. Axelrod's performance is more dance than acting and its fluid delivery meshes with dawson's lush use of multiple exposures, gauzy imagery, silhouettes and chiaroscuro. More a tone poem than a drama, *Defile in Veil* is nonetheless dramatic in its expression of the relationship between the interior and the exterior of its solitary protagonist. Beautiful and strangely haunting (its haunting quality enhanced by Patric Caird's elegiac musical score), *Defile in Veil* is a potent, evocative instance of cinematic poetry.

Tom McSorley is the head of the Canadian Film Institute.